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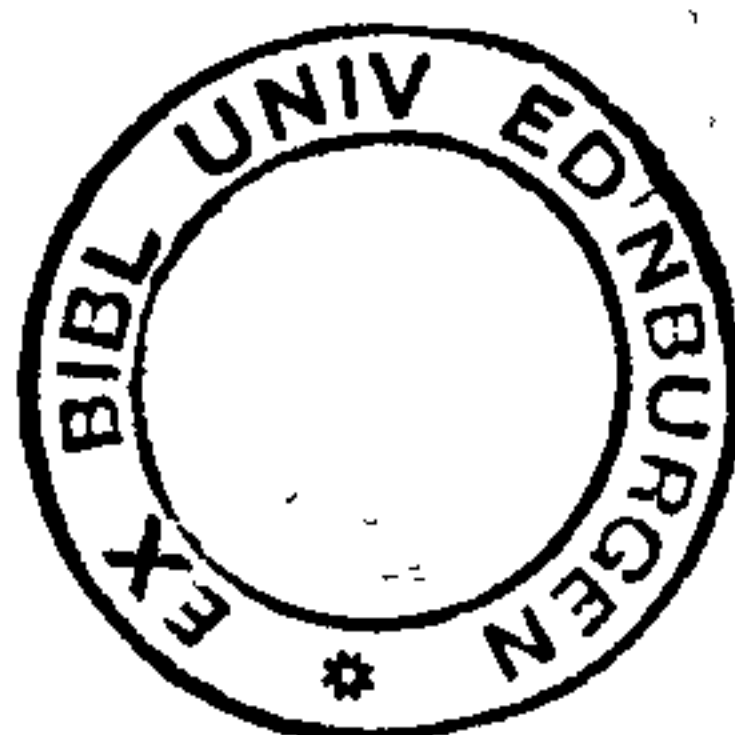
**AN INVESTIGATION OF FACTORS INFLUENCING JOHN CALVIN'S
USE OF THE LINGUISTIC AND HISTORICAL PRINCIPLES
OF BIBLICAL EXEGESIS**

**A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of Divinity
The University of Edinburgh**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Theology**

**by
John Paul Newport**

June 1953



NOTES ON TRANSLATIONS AND CITATIONS

The following practice has been observed in quoting from the works of Calvin:

1. Unless otherwise specified, the quotations from the Commentaries are from the Calvin Translation Society edition (1843-55) which has been republished by the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan (1947-50). The Commentaries are cited in footnotes by the appropriate chapter and verse from the Bible; thus, Com. Rom. 1:16. The Baum, Cunitz, and Reuss edition of the Commentaries, which is found in the Joannis Calvini Opera, has been consulted and utilized when important or controversial aspects of the study were under consideration. The Tholuck edition of the Commentaries, Joannis Calvini in Novum Testamentum Commentarii, has also been consulted. In some cases extremely archaic expressions in the Calvin Translation Society edition of the Commentaries have been changed. As a general rule, however, the translation has been followed.

2. The quotations from the Institutes are designated by book, chapter, and section; thus, I, xiv, 7. Unless other specified, the quotations from the Institutes are from the Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin, translated by Henry Beveridge, two volumes,

Edinburgh; T. and T. Clark, 1869. This is the 1559 edition of the Institutes. When important and controversial aspects of the study were under consideration, the Barth and Niesel Latin edition, which is found in the Johannis Calvini Opera Selecta, and the translation by John Allen have been consulted and utilized.

3. Unless otherwise specified, the quotations from the Tracts are from the three volumes prepared by the Calvin Translation Society (1844-51). The Tracts are cited by the appropriate volume and page. Volumes V-IX of the Joannis Calvini Opera have also been consulted in connection with Calvin's Tracts.

4. Unless otherwise specified, the quotations from the Letters are from the Letters of John Calvin, which were compiled by Jules Bonnet and translated by M. R. Gilchrist. The nine volumes of A. L. Herminjard entitled Correspondence des Réformateurs dans les pays de la langue française have been consulted. Some letters are quoted which are found only in the Opera, volumes X-XX.

5. The quotations from some of the other writings of Calvin which are not in English translation are from the Joannis Calvini Opera, edited by G. Baum, E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss. These quotations, which have been translated or paraphrased, are designated by volume and page; thus, CO, XVI, 330. The fifty-nine volumes of the

Opera are the same as volumes XXIV-LXXVII of the Corpus Reformatorum. The Johannis Calvini Opera Selecta, edited by P. Barth and G. Niesel, has also been consulted.

6. The sources of the quotations from other writings of Calvin or translations of his writings are individually specified.

In the case of German and French works for which English translations are nonexistent or were not available, translations or paraphrases have been made.

American spelling has been employed except in some quotations.

A Form Book for Thesis Writing by William Giles Campbell has been utilized for thesis form.

A Manual of Style published by the University of Chicago Press has been consulted in regard to matters of style and composition.

PREFACE

The realization of the importance of John Calvin in the history of hermeneutics first came to me as I sat in a class on the history of biblical interpretation under the late Professor William H. Davis at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Graduate work under Professor Davis increased still further my appreciation of the importance of Calvin as an exegete.

Then came the opportunity to do additional study in this field of interest at New College, University of Edinburgh. I wish to thank Professors William Manson, J. H. S. Burleigh, John Baillie, and Hugh Watt, who have been especially helpful and who have given encouragement and guidance. Under the supervision of my advisers I continued my research in this field at the Universities of Basel and Zurich. To Professors Oscar Cullmann and Emil Brunner I owe thanks for their encouragement and guidance.

Further study was done at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City. During my three periods of study in New York City, Professors John T. McNeill and Frederick C. Grant were especially helpful and gave me generous portions of their time.

Mr. J. B. Primrose and Miss Erma Leslie were unusually cooperative in connection with my study in the New College Library,

University of Edinburgh. I found the personnel of the libraries at the Universities of Basel, Zurich, and Geneva always ready to assist. I owe a special debt of gratitude to the Librarian of Union Theological Seminary, Mr. Robert Beach, for granting me many special privileges during hot summer days in New York City. To the librarians of the three schools where I have taught since returning from Edinburgh, I must also express deep appreciation. Mr. R. W. Severance of Baylor University, Waco, Texas; Miss Nelle C. Davidson of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana; and Professors L. R. Elliott and Charles Johnson of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas have all cooperated in supplying me with materials.

The last ascription of gratitude is due to those who have helped and encouraged me the most: my wife and my parents.

John Paul Newport

Fort Worth, Texas

April, 1953

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Importance of the study	1
The problem and statement of purpose	7
Review of related studies and justification of the present study	9
Method of approach and organization	11
Sources of data	16
Definition of terms	17
II. BASIC PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL EXEGESIS	19
Four basic principles of biblical exegesis	19
The linguistic principle	20
The historical principle	24
The theological principle	27
The homiletical principle	31
Calvin's recognition of basic exegetical principles	33
Historical conditioning of exegetical principles	54
Historical conditioning of Calvin's use of exegetical principles	56

CHAPTER

PAGE

III. FACTORS INFLUENCING CALVIN'S USE OF THE

LINGUISTIC PRINCIPLE 62

Developments in textual criticism 62

Introduction 62

The development of textual criticism 63

Luther's utilisation of textual criticism 69

Calvin and textual criticism 70

Humanist training 76

Linguistic training 76

The critical and logical emphasis of Humanism 90

Excessive use of allegory by some Patristic and

medieval exegetes 97

Use of allegory by some Patristic and medieval

exegetes 97

Reaction against allegory and emphasis on the

literal method of exegesis 103

Calvin's reaction against allegory and emphasis

on the literal method of exegesis 106

CHAPTER

PAGE

IV. FACTORS INFLUENCING CALVIN'S USE OF THE

HISTORICAL PRINCIPLE 119

Introduction 119

The problem of religious authority 119

General statement of approach 119

The problem presented by the Roman Catholic

emphasis on the Apocrypha of the Old Testa-

ment and tradition 121

The problem presented by the emphasis of the

radical sects on private revelations 142

The problem presented by the Humanism and

rationalism of the heretics 155

Increased emphasis on the canon, historical

background of the Bible and biblical books,

and chronology of the books of the Bible

caused by the necessity of combating the Ro-

man Catholic utilization of Apocrypha and tra-

dition and the emphasis of the radical sects on

private revelations. 172

CHAPTER

PAGE

Increased emphasis on the historical inerrancy,
infallibility, and finality of the contents of

the Bible caused by the necessity of combat-

ing the Roman Catholics, heretics, and rad-

ical sects 187

Increased emphasis on the legalistic approach

and the proof-text method in biblical exe-

gesis caused by disputes with the Roman

Catholics, radical sects, and heretics 203

V. CONCLUSION 236

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY 246

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The Ecumenical Study Conference which met at Wadham College, Oxford, in 1949, stated: "The Christian's authority lies in the will of God. It is agreed that the Bible stands in a unique position in mediating that will to us."¹ The Foreword of the World Council of Churches' symposium Biblical Authority for Today affirms that

It has always been the task of the Church to unfold the message of the Bible. . . . This is, in fact, the root of all Christian theology. But at the same time it is the source of many divisions which exist among us. If we in the fellowship of the World Council of Churches are eager to draw nearer to one another, it is most natural that we should turn to the Bible which bears the testimony of the undivided church of apostolic times.²

Writing in this same symposium, Wolfgang Schweitzer maintains that

The movement back to the Bible, which is observable in all confessions and in all parts of the world, clearly shows that there is a new readiness to receive direction from the Scripture. Even where we often do not appear to be unanimous about fundamental questions, there is evidence that, by listening in common to the message of the Bible, we may be able to proceed to a common in-

¹Alan Richardson and W. Schweitzer, editors, Biblical Authority for Today (London: S. C. M. Press, Ltd., 1951), p. 240.

²Ibid., p. 7.

terpretation and so to a common proclamation of the good news which it offers.³

In order to see this renewed interest in biblical interpretation in its proper perspective, it is necessary to go back to the decade between 1910 and 1920. According to Clarence Craig,⁴ this decade marked not only the climax of purely historical studies in the field of early Christianity, but it also laid the foundation for revolt against absorption in the Heraclitian flux of relativity. The second edition of Barth's Römerbrief sounded the battle cry against a theology engrossed in psychologism and historical relativities. Barth called men back to the revelation of a transcendent God who had spoken his Word to men. Some historians were somewhat scornful of the exegesis by which Barth extracted his theological ideas from Romans, I Corinthians, and Philipians. But the impressive thing was that it did not come from rejection of historical criticism, but from a reaffirmation of the absoluteness of divine revelation.

Many writers maintain that it was to Zwingli, Calvin, and Lu-

³Ibid., p. 154.

⁴C. T. Craig, "Biblical Theology and the Rise of Historicism," Journal of Biblical Literature, LXII, part 4 (1943), 289-91.

ther that Barth turned for doctrine.⁵ Mackintosh⁶ affirms that

Barth's line of ancestry goes back through Kierkegaard, Luther, and Calvin to Paul and Jeremiah. Aubrey⁷ joins those who trace Barth back to Calvin by saying that Barth is the Reformed theologian of our time, standing in the tradition of Calvin and sharing his faith in the sufficiency of the revelation contained in the Scriptures.

On the other hand, there are other writers who maintain that Barth and Brunner are not in the orthodox Calvinistic tradition.⁸

Most will agree, however, that in the central issues the "Neo-orthodox" movement is in harmony with many of the main emphases of Calvin and Luther. In any case, the "Neo-orthodox" movement has stimulated interest in Calvin and his exegetical and theological work.

Thus it is seen that there is some relationship between the renewed interest in the centrality of biblical authority and biblical ex-

⁵R. Birch Hoyle, The Teaching of Karl Barth (London: S. C. M. Press, Ltd., 1930), pp. 44-45.

⁶H. R. Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (London: Nisbet and Co., Ltd., 1937), p. 270.

⁷E. E. Aubrey, Present Theological Tendencies (New York: Harper and Bros., 1936), p. 77.

⁸Cf. Carl F. H. Henry, The Protestant Dilemma (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1949), pp. 43-121, 229-31, and Auguste Lecerf, An Introduction to Reformed Dogmatics (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949).

egesis, and the contemporary revival of interest in the Reformation.

This is certainly understandable; for one of the chief concerns of the Reformation was the attempt to restore the Bible to its place as the primary and exclusive source of religious authority. Closely connected with this task was the necessity of a proper interpretation of the message of the Bible.

There is a rather widespread agreement among Protestant scholars and biblical interpreters that the greatest of the Reformers, as far as biblical exegesis is concerned, was John Calvin. Many testimonies could be cited which would confirm this statement. George Adam Smith maintains,

The soundest exegete of the time was John Calvin: considering his means and opportunities, we may call him the greatest expositor of all time. To real exegetic skill he unites the full freedom of a Theodore of Mopsuestia with the profundity of a Luther.⁹

Broadus likewise states,

With the possible exception of Chrysostom, I think there is no commentator before our own century whose exegesis is so generally satisfactory, and so uniformly profitable as that of Calvin.¹⁰

⁹George Adam Smith, Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament (second edition; New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1901), p. 240.

¹⁰John A. Broadus, History of Preaching (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1896), p. 120.

Schaff¹¹ has collected sixty-two tributes to Calvin's greatness, many of which contain comments on Calvin's unique ability as a biblical exegete. Schaff maintains that despite the fact that he lived four hundred years ago,

Calvin was an exegetical genius of the first order. His commentaries are unsurpassed for originality, depth, perspicuity, soundness, and permanent value. The Reformation period was fruitful beyond any other in translations and expositions of the Scripture. If Luther was the king of translators, Calvin was the king of commentators.¹²

Kemper Fullerton gives an even more eulogistic statement in reference to Calvin's exegetical work.

Calvin may not unfittingly be called the first scientific interpreter in the history of the Christian Church. As an exegete he is the acknowledged chief among the Reformers. Adopting the same principles of interpretation as Luther did, he consistently applied them in his commentaries as Luther did. This is all the more astonishing as Calvin held many theological presuppositions which would have logically led to a complete abandonment of the historical meaning of the Old Testament in general and of prophecy in particular. . . In the case of no great commentator is it more necessary to distinguish between the theologian and the exegete than in the case of Calvin. Because of the consistency with which he applied his exegetical method in spite of all the inducements of his own dogmatic theories to depart from it, his commentaries can still be read with profit.¹³

¹¹Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), VII, pp. 272-95.

¹²Ibid., p. 524.

¹³Kemper Fullerton, Prophecy and Authority (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1919), p. 133.

H. Bauke, in Die Probleme der Theologie Calvins, maintains that after consulting the German and French literature on Calvin up to 1922, he found that an "antagonism" existed in the continental views about Calvin. This antagonism was between the standpoint of Ritschl and those dogmatists whom he influenced, Loofs and Seeberg, and another group (chiefly Reformed) which included A. Lang, Doumergue, Bohatec, Wernle, Dilthey, and Troeltsch. According to Bauke, the first group tended to regard Calvin, as over against Luther, only as a progeny of the Reformation. The other group regarded Calvin as the founder or fashioner of an independent type of Evangelical Reformed Christianity. Bauke points out, however, that he believes that all would agree that Calvin was a great exegete.¹⁴

Regardless of the many tributes which have been paid to Calvin's ability as an exegete, the contemporary revival of interest in the Reformation has revealed that Calvin has been studied to a large extent in terms of the systematic structure of the Institutes of 1559 without corresponding attention being given to the development of his thinking and the considerable quantity of material in the biblical com-

¹⁴H. Bauke, Die Probleme der Theologie Calvins (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1922).

mentaries.¹⁵ At least partially because of the fact that Calvin lived before the time of much of the historical and critical development in biblical studies and was in many ways a typical child of the sixteenth century, some have ignored, to a large extent, his exegetical writings. On the other hand, some have apparently ignored the fact that he was historically conditioned, and they have accepted his exegesis in an unqualified manner. Thus in order to avoid either of these extremes and to understand properly and evaluate correctly Calvin's worth and contribution as an exegete, it is necessary to see him in his historical setting and to examine the factors which influenced his use of basic exegetical principles.

II. THE PROBLEM AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Having seen something of the importance of the general area of theological thought to be considered by this study, attention should be given to the particular aspect of this area of theological thought to be investigated. In this thesis a study is to be made of the factors which influenced John Calvin's use of the two fundamental principles

¹⁵H. T. Kerr, Jr., "Review of E. A. Dowey's 'The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology,'" Interpretation, VI, No. 3 (July, 1952), 376-77. Among the exceptions to this statement is T. F. Torrance's Calvin's Doctrine of Man (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949). Extensive use of Calvin's commentaries is a characteristic of this work.

of biblical exegesis--the linguistic and the historical.

In seeking to achieve this suggested purpose, attention will be given in Chapter II to the arrangement of exegetical principles under four general headings--the linguistic, historical, theological, and homiletical. Next, a study will be made of Calvin's recognition of these principles of exegesis. Consideration will then be given to the extent to which Calvin's exegesis was historically conditioned. Following this, a study will be made, in a general way, of some of the factors which influenced Calvin's use of the theological and homiletical principles of exegesis. Primary attention will be reserved, however, for the two other principles which were probably conditioned the most by his historical background--the linguistic and historical.

In Chapter III a study will be made of three factors influencing Calvin's use of the linguistic principle. In Chapter IV attention will be given to a study of the factors which influenced Calvin's use of the historical principle. The three factors suggested are considered under the general heading of religious authority. This chapter involves a study of the influence of Calvin's controversies with the Roman Catholics, radical sects, and heretics on his use of the historical principle of exegesis.

An attempt will be made to discover, on the basis of the

study which has been outlined, that part of Calvin's exegesis which is historically conditioned and that part which is of universal and permanent value.

III. REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Despite a rather widespread interest in Calvin's exegetical writings and exegetical methods, one finds very few extensive discussions of the factors which influenced his use of the linguistic and historical principles of biblical exegesis. Certainly many brief treatments of these factors are to be found in theological journals, monographs, encyclopedias, and textbooks on the history of doctrine and the history of hermeneutics. Apparently more attention has been given to a consideration of the factors influencing Calvin's use of the theological and homiletical factors than to those influencing the linguistic and historical factors. In the last division of Chapter II more detailed consideration will be given to the relative amount of attention that has been devoted to the four principles of exegesis. It is also true that there are numerous monographs and books dealing with particular aspects of the factors which influenced Calvin's principles of exegesis. Such topics as Calvin's Humanist training; linguistic training; attitude toward allegory; controversies with Roman Catholics;

radical sects, and heretics; doctrine of accommodation; and legalism have received more or less extensive treatment. Individual works dealing with these particular subjects will be indicated as the study progresses.

Although a more extensive list will be given as the study develops, it will be helpful in this introductory section to call attention to a few representative articles, investigations, and books which deal with certain facets of the subject of this thesis. For example, there are several articles, which have appeared in recent years in theological journals, which consider Calvin's recognition of basic principles of exegesis. These include an article by Paul T. Fuhrmann in Interpretation and one by Paul Lehmann in Theology Today. An excellent discussion of Calvin's Humanist training is found in Quirinus Breen's John Calvin: A Study in French Humanism. One aspect of Calvin's linguistic background has been discussed in detail by A. J. Baumgartner in Calvin Hebraisant et Interprète de L'ancien Testament. Some of the more recent books which deal with Calvin's view of religious authority and the Bible include The Problem of Authority in the Continental Reformation by Rupert E. Davies, The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology by E. A. Dowey, The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God by T. H. L. Parker, and The Heritage of the Reformation by

Wilhelm Pauck. In addition to Doumergue, French writers who have been helpful include Henri Clavier, who has shown considerable interest in Calvin's exegetical work, Pannier, and Lecerf. Several German writers have also furnished helpful materials. These include Peter Barth, Peter Brunner, Seeburg, Bauke, and Lobstein. A significant Dutch work which contains material on Calvin's view of religious authority is Gereformeerde Dogmatiek by H. Bavinck. The standard and rather well known works in English by Warfield, Hunter, Fullerton, and Binns deal with certain aspects of this study. Most of the standard biographies have been consulted. The date of publication and other data about the books just mentioned and other books utilized in this study will be found in the bibliography. The particular contribution and the relation of these books to this study will be indicated as the study progresses.

Although various separate aspects of the problem of this thesis have been treated in various ways by various authors, there does not appear to have been an effort to organize and relate these materials in the way which is attempted in this study.

IV. METHOD OF APPROACH AND ORGANIZATION

The literary activity of Calvin, whether considered from the

standpoint of the number or the importance of his works, is not surpassed by any ecclesiastical writer, ancient or modern.¹⁶ At the University of Strasbourg one of the largest Calvin libraries in the world has been assembled. This collection was gathered by Professors Baum, Cunitz, and Reuss, the editors of Calvin's works, during half a century and embraces 274 publications written by Calvin.¹⁷ His letters alone number several thousand. Over two thousand of his sermons have been preserved.

The approach utilized in this thesis is limited to a consideration of possible factors influencing one phase of his extensive work--the field of exegesis. It must be granted that all of Calvin's writings are related, directly or indirectly, to an exposition of the Bible. Calvin's "Epistle to the Reader" in the 1559 edition of the Institutes states that "my object in this work has been . . . to prepare . . . candidates for . . . the study of the sacred volume . . ."¹⁸ The Institutes, however, are concerned primarily with a systematic approach to biblical theology. In fact, the Institutes came to be regarded as the theologi-

¹⁶Schaff, op. cit., p. 267.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 223.

¹⁸John Calvin, "Epistle to the Reader," Institutes of the Christian Religion, translated by Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1869), I.

cal exposition of Protestantism. Calvin's ^tpreaching (Praelectiones) also dealt primarily with the exposition or exegesis of the Scriptures. Calvin's sermons are less technical and exact, however, than the commentaries.

Primary consideration, therefore, will be given to the commentaries. Although many of the commentaries were based on notes in Latin taken by pupils, secretaries, and, after 1549, stenographers, they were edited by an assistant and revised by Calvin. The prefaces were by the hand of Calvin. The commentaries are more orderly and concise than the sermons.¹⁹

The commentaries themselves form an extensive body of literature. The exposition and application to life of practically the whole Bible, book by book, passage by passage, verse by verse, and often word by word was a colossal undertaking and achievement. In fact, Calvin wrote commentaries on all of the books of the Bible except eight of the Old Testament and one of the New Testament.

In this study the commentaries on the Pauline epistles will be subject to more attention than will the other commentaries written by Calvin. Like Luther, Calvin seemed to have the conviction that it

¹⁹Paul T. Fuhrmann, "Calvin, the Expositor of Scripture," Interpretation, VI, No. 2 (April, 1952), p. 192.

was Paul's interpretation of the Christian gospel which had to be regarded as the central interpretation of Christ to be found in the whole New Testament. Even in the Institutes the Pauline epistles are quoted more frequently than any other group of biblical books.

As has already been noted, attention will be restricted primarily to the factors which influenced Calvin's use of the linguistic and historical principles of biblical exegesis. It was originally intended to examine in detail the factors influencing all four of the basic principles of exegesis. This original plan was changed to the plan now being followed for several reasons. For one thing, the factors influencing Calvin's use of the theological and homiletical principles are more obvious, and more attention has been given to them by writers in the field of Calvin studies. Furthermore, a detailed consideration of the factors influencing Calvin's use of the theological and homiletical principles would have necessitated dealing with areas which in themselves should command separate treatment. Since the linguistic and historical principles of exegesis are basic and were probably conditioned the most by Calvin's particular historical background, training, and controversies, these were chosen for the purpose of this study.

It is customary in research work to restrict direct quotations in length and number. Long quotations sometimes confuse the

reader and oftentimes give the impression that the thesis is a mere compilation of quoted material. In certain sections of this thesis, however, numerous and sometimes rather long quotations have been included. This has been done deliberately. Many works dealing with Calvin merely list the references to the Commentaries, Institutes, and other of his works. It appears, however, that much of the actual spirit of Calvin and the stimulus of his personality is lost by such an approach. In this study an attempt has been made actually to quote a rather representative group of Calvin's statements in connection with each major problem under consideration. It will be noted that even in translation the impact of Calvin's tremendous personality is conveyed when this method of collecting and quoting his actual statements is utilized. The least that can be said is that Calvin is not nearly so dull and prosaic as many of those who have written about him in subsequent generations. In many cases Calvin's most significant statements would be meaningless or at least difficult to understand unless they were given in context. This fact accounts for the length of some of the quotations used in this study.

The arrangement of the various principles of hermeneutics under the four heads utilized in this study is admittedly somewhat subjective and arbitrary. Likewise, the choice of factors influencing Calvin's use of these principles will be questioned by some. Other fac-

tors could be added and other arrangements of the factors could be devised. It is believed, however, that the plan followed makes for clarity and will furnish an adequate framework for this study.

V. SOURCES OF DATA

As has already been indicated, one of the chief sources of data will be the Commentaries of Calvin. However, much material from his other writings including the Institutes, tracts, letters, and sermons will be utilized. A detailed account of the method used in quoting from the writings of Calvin has already been given in the Notes. Other works about Calvin and subjects related to this study which have been consulted are listed in the Selected Bibliography.

In this type of study, which necessarily surveys many broad areas of theological thought, it will be necessary in some cases to rely on secondary sources for some of the broader aspects of the thesis. This has been avoided as much as possible. Since these broader aspects of the thesis occupy a supporting or subsidiary place, it is believed that the occasional use of secondary sources will not detract from the effectiveness of the study. Materials dealing with Calvin's own statements are taken directly from primary sources or from recognized translations of primary sources.

The purposes of this study do not call for a detailed linguistic study of numerous texts in the Latin and French originals. Rather, this study calls for a broad survey of the factors influencing Calvin's use of the linguistic and historical principles of biblical exegesis. It will not be necessary or particularly helpful to quote the Latin and French text in order to achieve the desired objective. Latin and French sources have been utilized, however, in the preparation of this thesis.

VI. DEFINITION OF TERMS

For the purpose of clarification, it will be helpful to make some observations about two terms used in this study which are closely related in meaning--hermeneutics and exegesis.

Terry makes the following distinctions:

Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. Biblical or Sacred Hermeneutics is the science of interpreting the Holy Scriptures. Hermeneutics aims to establish the principles, methods, and rules which are needful to unfold the sense of what is written. Exegesis is the application of these principles and laws, the actual bringing into formal statement, and by other terms, the meaning of the author's words. . . . The exegete takes up the words of the sacred writers and by means of the principles of hermeneutics defines their meaning, elucidates the scope and plan of each writer, and brings forth the grammatico-historical sense of what each book contains.²⁰

²⁰Milton S. Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics (New York: Easton and Mains, 1890), pp. 17-20.

These distinctions are also agreed upon by F. R. Grant. / C. ?

Hermeneutics is the theory or set of principles upon which interpretation is made. Exegesis is the actual detailed interpretation. The word "exegesis" is from the Greek ἐξήγησις, primarily a leading out, then coming to mean an interpretation, an explanation, a making clear.²¹ It is admitted that "hermeneutics" is designated as the principles of interpretation and "exegesis" is the actual interpretation.²² However, in actual practice the two terms have become almost interchangeable. They are used as synonymous terms in this thesis.

²¹Frederick Grant, "Biblical Exegesis," Encyclopedia Americana, 1950 edition, X, 628.

²²J. A. Ernesti, Principles of Biblical Interpretation, translated by Charles H. Terrot (Edinburgh: Thomas Clark, 1832), I, viii.

CHAPTER II

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

I. FOUR BASIC PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

There are numerous ways in which the generally accepted and basic principles of biblical exegesis could be outlined and arranged. In a recent book, Biblical Authority for Today, are found some "Guiding Principles for the Interpretation of the Bible" as accepted by the Ecumenical Study Conference, held at Wadham College, Oxford, in 1949. The editors state that

. . . our conference has endeavored, on the basis of the work of earlier conferences, to develop specific principles of interpretation, for the use of the Bible in relation to social and political questions. . . . In our study together we have used Jeremiah 7:1-15 as a test case in discovering the extent of agreement in the application of hermeneutical principles. We have found a measure of agreement that surprised us all.¹

There appears to be a general consensus as to the basic exegetical principles. It is believed that the four principles which are suggested in this thesis--the linguistic, historical, theological, and homiletical--are generally accepted as the basic principles for biblical exegesis.

Some will suggest variations of arrangement, wording, and order, but

¹Alan Richardson and W. Schweitzer, editors, Biblical Authority for Today (London: S. C. M. Press, Ltd., 1951), p. 240.

the principles will be essentially the same.

The Bible is composed of a body of literature. As such, it is a part of the literature of the world, having features in common with all other literatures and also features peculiar to itself. Biblical interpretation is a section of general interpretation. Here all students of the Bible are on common ground. Rationalistic, evangelical, scholastic, and mystical--they should all alike begin here.²

The linguistic principle. From general interpretation arises our first basic principle--the linguistic or grammatical principle.

The Bible is written in human languages. The Bible is a historical product; and, however divine it may be according to its final origin and essential contents, it was written by men in human languages and under human relations. It is to be interpreted, therefore, with similar helps and according to the same principles as other books of antiquity.³ The great defect of ancient and medieval interpretation was in the neglect of the grammar of the Bible and in the dependence upon the Septuagint and Vulgate versions. Hence a multitude of errors that

²C. A. Briggs, Biblical Study, Its Principles, Methods, and History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890), pp. 351-52.

³Albert Immer, Hermeneutics of the New Testament (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1877), p. 87.

have come into the traditional exegesis through the fathers and schoolmen, have taken generations of grammatical study to eradicate,⁴

John Calvin was one of the men who has done the most to restore the linguistic principle. Calvin's use of this principle will be given consideration in the next chapter.

In more modern times Ernesti was a pioneer in restoring this principle to its rightful place. Ernesti was essentially a philologist rather than a theologian, and he applied to the Bible the principles which he had employed in the interpretation of the ancient classics. Ernesti began at the foundation of interpretation, grammatical exegesis, and placed it in such a position before the world that it has ever since maintained its fundamental importance. He published his principles of interpretation in 1761.⁵ About the same time Semler urged the importance of historical interpretation. These elements of interpretation were combined in the grammatico-historical method of C. A. G. Keil.⁶

The first and basic principle of exegesis in practically all books on hermeneutics is the linguistic or grammatical principle. In

⁴Briggs, loc. cit.

⁵Ibid., p. 347.

⁶Ibid., pp. 347-48.

listing the various operations necessary for a Scripture interpreter, Immer mentions at the very outset the criticism of the text and the grammatical explanation.⁷ The Ecumenical Study Conference, mentioned before, agreed that one must start with a historical and critical examination of the passage. This includes the determination of the text, the literary form of the passage, and the meaning which the words had for the original author and hearer or reader.⁸ James Mullenburg has included in suggested principles of interpretation the establishment of the text, the determination of the meaning of the words, and their relationship to each other and the literary form.⁹ In Roman Catholic circles, as represented by a recent book by Gerard Rooney, the following are included in the rules for interpretation: Establish the remote context; establish the complete context; establish the immediate context; make sure you have what the author said; make sure you understand the exact sense of the words of the text; and determine the literary mode of expression used by the sacred author.¹⁰

⁷Immer, op. cit., p. 104.

⁸Richardson and Schweitzer, op. cit., pp. 241-42.

⁹Ibid., pp. 207-13.

¹⁰Gerard Rooney, Preface to the Bible (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1949), pp. 49-75.

Closely akin to the linguistic principle, and for the purposes of this study considered under the linguistic principle, is logical and rhetorical interpretation. The biblical writers wrote for the men of their own times and used the forms of thought of the men of their time. The proper use of logical interpretation is to seek for the method of reasoning of the biblical author.¹¹ Those who take the logical methods of the apostle Paul as the key to the New Testament and interpret by him the practical James and the mystic John do violence to these other writers.¹² Closely related to logical interpretation is rhetorical interpretation. We have to discriminate in the Bible between the more logical parts and the more rhetorical parts. In rhetorical exegesis it is essential to discriminate poetry from prose. It is also important to note the style of each author as well as the literary peculiarities of the people and race which produced the Bible.¹³ The Ecumenical Study Conference pointed out that allegorical interpretations which were not intended by the biblical authors are arbitrary and their use may be a disservice to the proper recognition of biblical authority. Christian exegesis has been justified, however, in recognizing as di-

¹¹Briggs, op. cit., pp. 354-55.

¹²Ibid., pp. 356-57.

¹³Loc. cit.

vinely established a certain correspondence between some events and teachings of the Old Testament and of the New Testament.¹⁴

One of the significant contributions of the Antiochian school, established toward the close of the third century, was the fact that it stated that every passage has its literal meaning and only one meaning. They said, however, that one must distinguish between plain and figurative language and interpret each passage in accordance with its nature.¹⁵ Terry likewise points out that basic principles of interpretation include the primary meaning of words, the context, the grammatico-historical sense (words and sentences can have but one signification in one and the same connection), and context and scope of the author's work.¹⁶

The linguistic or grammatical principle has been established as the first of the basic principles of exegesis.

The historical principle. The second basic principle of biblical exegesis is the historical principle. This principle also is almost universally recognized. Muilenburg states that the historical setting

¹⁴Richardson and Schweitzer, op. cit., p. 241.

¹⁵Briggs, op. cit., pp. 325-26.

¹⁶Milton S. Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics (New York: Easton and Mains, 1890), p. 103.

and background should be determined and the oriental character of the Bible noted.¹⁷ Immer calls this principle the "Real-explanation" and suggests that it include a consideration of the physical, geographical, historical, and chronological background materials.¹⁸ The historical principle should include a study of the author, time, place, and circumstances of writing, affirms Terry.¹⁹ The Ecumenical Study Conference lists as a basic rule of exegesis a study of the historical situation, the Sitz im Leben.²⁰

Although it is generally agreed that the historical principle is a necessary principle of exegesis, there are differences of opinion in regard to the use of this principle. For the evangelical, in historical exegesis, it is to be recognized that the biblical writers were men of their times and yet men above their times. They were influenced by inspiration to introduce new divine revelations and to revive old truths and set them in a new light. The rationalistic interpreter would not accept all of the supernatural emphasis of the evangelical.²¹ Supernatu-

¹⁷Richardson and Schweitzer, op. cit., pp. 207-13.

¹⁸Immer, loc. cit.

¹⁹Terry, op. cit., p. 129.

²⁰Richardson and Schweitzer, op. cit., pp. 241-42.

²¹Briggs, op. cit., pp. 358-59.

ralists come to the Bible as an organic whole. Rationalists come to the Bible as a collection of human writings. The rationalists sink the unity in the variety; the scholastics destroy the variety for the sake of unity. The evangelical position, according to Briggs, is that the Bible is a vast organism in which the unity springs from an amazing variety.²² In any case, the historical principle is recognized as a valid principle.

The problem of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament could well be considered a part of the historical principle. It is of decisive importance for hermeneutical method to interpret the Old Testament in the light of the total revelation in the person of Jesus Christ, affirms the Ecumenical Study Conference.²³ Furthermore, an Old Testament passage should be examined and expounded in relation to the revelation of God to Israel both before and after its own period. A New Testament passage should be examined in the light of its setting and context, then examined in the light of the Old Testament to discover its background in God's former revelation. Returning to the New Testament, a person is able to see the passage

²²Briggs, loc. cit.

²³Richardson and Schweitzer, op. cit., p. 241.

in the light of the whole scope of Heilsgeschichte.²⁴ Historical differences in the various parts of the Scripture are not to be overlooked.

The historical principle is of fundamental importance.

The theological principle. The third basic principle of biblical exegesis is the theological principle. In the Bible God's Word confronts man, affirms the Ecumenical Study Conference. The primary message of the Bible concerns God's gracious and redemptive activity for the saving of sinful man that he might create in Jesus Christ a people for himself. The starting point, therefore, of the Christian interpreter lies within the redeemed community of which by faith he is a member.²⁵ It is necessary to know God and his Christ in order properly to interpret the Bible. The Scriptures cannot be understood from the outside by grammar, logic, rhetoric, and history alone. The Bible is to be understood from its center--its heart--its Christ. It is this personal relation of the Author of the entire Scripture to the interpreter that enables him truly to understand the divine things of Scripture. Jesus Christ knew the Old Testament and interpreted it as one who knew the mind of God. The apostles interpreted

²⁴Ibid., p. 242.

²⁵Ibid., p. 240.

the Scriptures from the mind of Christ, read by the Spirit he had given them.²⁶

The Pietistic school has probably put too much emphasis on the experiential aspect of interpretation. The grammatico-historical method, however, also was carried too far; and Stäudlein and others such as Germar rendered great service by urging that the interpreter should enter into sympathy with the spirit of the biblical authors.²⁷ The little band of Pietists of the older Tübingen school also urged the inadequacy of the grammatico-historical method and insisted upon faith and piety in the interpreter. This group included Storr, Knapp, and Seiler.²⁸ Lücke, of Schleiermacher's school, insisted upon love for the Word of God as the indispensable requisite for the interpreter.²⁹

The theological principle also includes that which is called "doctrinal interpretation." The Bible is the rule of faith, affirms Briggs. It is to be interpreted in accordance with the analogy of faith. This analogy is the substance of Scripture doctrine found in the plainest passages of Scripture. This was the view of Calvin and other of

²⁶Briggs, op. cit., pp. 363-64.

²⁷Ibid., p. 348.

²⁸Loc. cit.

²⁹Ibid., p. 350.

the Reformers. But the Scholastics substituted for this internal rule of faith an external rule of faith--first in the Apostles' Creed, then in the symbols of the churches, and finally in the Reformed or Lutheran or Anglican systems of doctrine. And thus the Scriptures became the slaves of dogmatic a priori systems.³⁰ Immer points out that Dogmatic interpretation prevailed, especially in the Protestant Church, at the time of the domination of Orthodoxy. It erred chiefly in starting from definite dogmatic presuppositions, interpreting according to these, and in settling beforehand the result which should be reached.³¹ The evangelical interpreter is to find a system of theology in the Bible itself which he has learned as "Biblical theology" which is to be carefully distinguished from Dogmatic theology.³² Rooney, the Catholic writer, also states that an interpreter should always bear in mind the analogy of faith and explain Scripture by Scripture.³³

The theological principle also includes a consideration of the literature of interpretation. The Bible is the canon of the Christian church. What relation does it sustain to the church? We are sepa-

³⁰Ibid., pp. 362-63.

³¹Immer, op. cit., p. 85.

³²Briggs, loc. cit.

³³Rooney, loc. cit.

rated from the originals by ages. Multitudes of students have studied the Bible, and their labor has not been in vain. How far is the exegete to go in allowing himself to be influenced by the history of exegesis? The Roman Catholic Church makes the church itself, the fathers, and councils the expositors of Scripture to which all exposition is to be conformed. According to Briggs, we have learned from the history of exegesis how false this position is. The literature of exegesis is an invaluable aid, but this help is as much negative as positive. It exhibits a vast multitude of errors that have been exposed and so prevents us from stumbling into them. It shows us a great number of positions so plainly established and fortified that it would be folly to question them. But at the same time it presents weak positions. The literature of exegesis directs us to the fruitful soil of the Bible, the fields to be worked, and the problems to be solved.³⁴ Mullenburg emphasizes that the later history of a passage should be examined.³⁵ Gerard Rooney, the Catholic writer, understandably states that whenever the Church gives an authentic interpretation of Scripture, a person should accept it.³⁶ *authoritative?*

³⁴Briggs, op. cit., pp. 360-61.

³⁵Richardson and Schweitzer, op. cit., pp. 207-13.

³⁶Rooney, loc. cit.

Another phase of the theological principle is the fact that an interpreter should view the biblical teachings in the light of the tension between life in the kingdoms of this world and participation in the kingdom of God. The scriptural teaching of the two ages has an important bearing upon the way in which a specific social or political issue is to be interpreted.³⁷

The theological principle is an important principle, and its importance is being recognized in recent years.

The homiletical principle. The fourth principle of biblical exegesis is the homiletical or practical principle. The culmination of biblical interpretation is the application of the biblical message to the modern world. In pointing out the necessity of recognizing this principle, the Ecumenical Study Conference emphasized that one must first discover the degree to which the particular situation is similar to that which the Bible presents. Although the Bible speaks primarily to the church, it also speaks through the church to the world inasmuch as the whole world is claimed by the church's Lord.³⁸ It is agreed that in applying the biblical message to the present day, interpreters

³⁷ Richardson and Schweitzer, op. cit., pp. 242-43.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 243.

diverge because of differing doctrinal and ecclesiastical traditions; differing ethical, political, and cultural outlooks; differing geographical and sociological situations; and differing temperaments and gifts. The Ecumenical Study Conference suggests that when interpreters meet together and bring their presuppositions (of which they may be largely unconscious) to the judgment of Scripture, some of the very difficulties are removed which prevent the gospel from being heard. Thus the Bible itself leads the interpreters back to the living Word of God.³⁹ Biblical interpretation would not be complete unless it reached its culmination in practical interpretation, in the experience and life of mankind.⁴⁰

Thus it is seen that all four of these basic principles are necessary. Exegetical work is not only scientific work, but it is also practical work which rests on scientific investigation. An exegete needs to mediate between the scientific and practical understanding of Scripture. In the words of Immer, "The health of the Christian Church depends essentially upon the mutual confidence and harmonious cooperation of men of theological science and men of theological praxis."⁴¹

³⁹Richardson and Schweitzer, loc. cit.

⁴⁰Briggs, op. cit., p. 366.

⁴¹Immer, op. cit., pp. 375-77.

To be both scientific and practical, all four basic principles must be recognized and utilized.

II. CALVIN'S RECOGNITION OF BASIC EXEGETICAL PRINCIPLES

That Calvin recognized the four basic principles of biblical exegesis which have been enumerated, is not difficult to substantiate.

The linguistic principle. Calvin made much of the linguistic factor, especially when one considers that the critical apparatus and linguistic equipment of his day had definite limitations. In a letter to Peter Viret, which is dated May nineteenth, 1540, Calvin gave us his conception of the duty of an expositor.

Zwingli, although he is not wanting in a fit and ready exposition, yet, because he takes too much liberty, often wanders far from the meaning of the Prophet. Luther is not so particular as to propriety of expression or the historical accuracy; he is satisfied when he can draw from it some fruitful doctrine. No one, as I think, has hitherto more diligently applied himself to this pursuit than Oecolampadius, who has not always, however, reached the full scope of meaning.⁴²

One of the great goals of Calvin's life--one to which he referred shortly before his death in his farewell to the Genevan pastors--

⁴²Jules Bonnet, Letters of John Calvin (Edinburgh: Thomas Constable and Co., 1855), I, 164.

was purity of doctrine; and for him this was primarily right understanding of Scripture.

Concerning my doctrine, I have taught faithfully and God has given me the grace to write. I have done this as faithfully as possible and have not corrupted a single passage of Scripture or knowingly twisted it.⁴³

An example of this goal of Calvin's life is to be seen in his commentary on Ephesians 1:10:

In the old translation it is rendered (instaurare) restore; to which Erasmus has added (summam) comprehensively. I have chosen to abide closely by the meaning of the Greek word, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθα, because it is more agreeable to the context.⁴⁴

As a part of the linguistic factor he recognized the necessity of dealing with the problem of the text. An example of this is found in his discussion of Hebrews 11:21, where Calvin explained a difficulty by discussing the problem of points in the Hebrew language.

"... Jacob . . . worshipped, on the top of his staff." This is one of those places from which we may conclude that the points were not formerly used by the Hebrews; for the Greek translators could not have made such a mistake as to put staff here for a bed, if the mode of writing was then the same as now. No doubt Moses spoke of the head of his couch, when he said לְרֹאשׁ הַמִּטָּה לְרֹאשׁ by ol rash emeth; but the Greek translators rendered the words, "on the top of his staff," as though the last word was writ-

⁴³G. Baum, E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss, editors, Johannis Calvini Opera (59 vols.; Brunswick: Schwetschke and Son, 1863-1900), IX, 893. The Baum, Cunitz, and Reuss source is hereafter designated as CO.

⁴⁴Com. Eph. 1:10.

al
rosh
hammitchah

was hammathah
 ten, mathaeh. The Apostle hesitated not to apply to his purpose what was commonly received; he was indeed writing to the Jews; but they were dispersed into various countries, had changed their own language for the Greek. And we know that the Apostles were not so scrupulous in this respect, as not to accommodate themselves to the unlearned, who had as yet need of milk; and in this there is no danger, provided readers are ever brought back to the pure and original text of Scripture.⁴⁵

In some cases Calvin confessed that he could not explain the text and context and difficulties. In commenting on Matthew 27:9, he gave an example of this:

"Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet." How the name of Jeremiah crept in, I confess that I do not know, nor do I give myself much trouble to inquire. The passage itself plainly shows that the name of Jeremiah has been put down by mistake, instead of Zechariah, (11:13) for in Jeremiah we find nothing of this sort, nor any thing that even approaches it.⁴⁶

Under the linguistic factor the proposition that Scripture has only one literal meaning has been considered. Calvin wholeheartedly accepted this proposition. He had no use for the artificial and disingenuous method practiced and popularized by Origen which discovered layers of meaning under the outer skin of the letter, deep mysteries lurking under the deceptive surface. This problem is discussed at length in his commentary on Galatians 4:22.

But as the apostle declares that these things are allegorized,

⁴⁵Com. Heb. 11:21.

⁴⁶Com. Matt. 27:9.

(ἀλληγούμενα.) Origen, and many others along with him, have seized the occasion of torturing Scripture, in every possible manner, away from the true sense. They concluded that the literal sense is too mean and poor, and that, under the outer bark of the letter, there lurk deeper mysteries, which cannot be extracted but by beating out allegories. And this they had no difficulty in accomplishing; for speculations which appear to be ingenious have always been preferred, and always will be preferred, by the world to solid doctrine.⁴⁷

Calvin felt so strongly about the abuses practiced by allegory that he continued in an even more emphatic way.

With such approbation the licentious system gradually attained such a height, that he who handled Scripture for his own amusement not only was suffered to pass unpunished, but even attained the highest applause. For many centuries no man was considered to be ingenious, who had not the skill and daring necessary for changing into a variety of curious shapes the sacred word of God. This was undoubtedly a contrivance of Satan to undermine the authority of Scripture, and to take away from the reading of it the true advantage. God visited this profanation by a just judgment, when he suffered the pure meaning of the Scripture to be buried under false interpretations. Scripture, they say, is fertile, and thus produces a variety of meanings. I acknowledge that Scripture is a most rich and inexhaustible fountain of all wisdom; but I deny that its fertility consists in the various meanings which any man, at his pleasure, may assign. Let us know then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and obvious meaning; and let us embrace and abide by it resolutely. Let us not only neglect as doubtful, but boldly set aside as deadly corruptions, those pretended expositions, which lead us away from the natural meaning.⁴⁸

Calvin found it frivolous to see Christ in the woman's seed of

⁴⁷Com. Gal. 4:22.

⁴⁸Loc. cit.

Genesis 3:15; the Trinity in "us" of Genesis 3:22, in the three messengers of Genesis 18:2, and in the "holy, holy, holy" of Isaiah 6:3. Neither Genesis 19:24 nor John 10:30 should be used to prove the deity of Christ. Calvin disagreed even with the writer of Hebrews himself who, at 2:5-7, had transformed Psalm 8:5-6 into an assertion of the greatness of Christ instead of man. He was not always consistent, however, in his approach to the Old Testament.

An appreciation of the method of reasoning utilized by the various authors is also recognized by Calvin as an important aspect of interpretation. An example of this is seen in his discussion of Matthew 13:12:

The Evangelists, as we have remarked on former occasions, were not very exact in arranging Christ's discourses, but frequently throw together a variety of sayings uttered by him. Luke mixes this sentence with other discourses of Christ spoken at different times, and likewise points out a different purpose for which Christ used these words.⁴⁹

These examples of Calvin's recognition of the linguistic factor are only representative. Other examples will be given in Chapter III.

The historical principle. There is no question about the fact that Calvin recognized the importance of the historical principle.

⁴⁹Com. Matt. 13:12.

In his Commentaries constant attention is given to the historical setting and background and authorship of the various biblical books.

Concerning II Peter, Calvin states that

The doubts respecting this Epistle mentioned by Eusebius, ought not to keep us from reading it. . . . What Jerome writes influences me somewhat more, that some, induced by a difference in style, did not think that Peter was the author. For though some affinity may be traced, yet I confess that there is that manifest difference which distinguishes different writers. There are also other probable conjectures by which we may conclude that it was written by another rather than by Peter. At the same time, according to the consent of all, it has nothing unworthy of Peter, as it shows everywhere the power and the grace of an apostolic spirit. If it be received as canonical, we must allow Peter to be the author, since it has his name inscribed, and he also testified that he had lived with Christ; and it would have been a fiction unworthy of a minister of Christ, to have impersonated another individual. So then I conclude, that if the Epistle be deemed worthy of credit, it must have proceeded from Peter; not that he himself wrote it, but that some one of his disciples set forth in writing, by his command, those things which the necessity of the times required. . . . Doubtless, as in every part of the Epistle the majesty of the Spirit of Christ appears, to repudiate it is what I dread, though I do not here recognize the language of Peter. But since it is not quite evident as to the author, I shall allow myself the liberty of using the word Peter or Apostle indiscriminately.⁵⁰

Calvin also recognized the dispute over the authenticity of Jude.

Though there was a dispute among the ancients respecting this Epistle, yet as the reading of it is useful, and as it contains nothing inconsistent with the purity of apostolic doctrine, and was received as authentic formerly, by some of the best, I willingly

⁵⁰ Com. II Pet. "Argument."

add it to the others.⁵¹

The epistle of James likewise came under Calvin's scrutiny:

It appears from the writings of Jerome and Eusebius, that this Epistle was not formerly received by many Churches without opposition. . . . It is enough to make men to receive this Epistle, that it contains nothing unworthy of an Apostle of Christ. . . . But as to the author, there is somewhat more reason for doubting. It is indeed certain that he was not the son of Zebedee, for Herod killed him shortly after our Lord's resurrection. The ancients are nearly unanimous in thinking that he was one of the disciples named Oblias and a relative of Christ, who was set over the Church at Jerusalem. . . . I am therefore rather inclined to the conjecture, that he of whom Peter speaks was the son of Alphæus. . . . But whether of the two was the writer of this Epistle, it is not for me to say.⁵²

Calvin did not accept the Pauline authorship of the epistle to the Hebrews.

This passage indicates that this epistle was not written by Paul; for he did not usually speak so humbly of himself, as to confess that he was one of the Apostles' disciples, nor did he thus speak from ambition, but because wicked men under a pretence of this kind attempted to detract from the authority of his doctrine. It then appears evident that it was not Paul who wrote that he had the Gospel by hearing and not by revelation.⁵³

A good example of Calvin's consideration of the historical aspect of interpretation is seen in his description of the way in which the book of Isaiah has been handed down to us.

⁵¹Com. Jude. "Argument."

⁵²Com. James. "Argument."

⁵³Com. Heb. 2:3.

† The coherence of this citation suffers from your omission of certain sentences, as may be seen by the fact that in the citation, as you give it, there is nothing to explain the words "of whom Peter speaks."

There is indeed a highly probable conjecture, amounting almost to certainty, that he prophesied ten years beyond the period which has now been stated; but as this does not clearly rest on historical proof, I shall not debate the matter any farther. A question may arise, was it Isaiah himself, or some other person, that wrote this inscription to his Prophecy? For my own part, though I cannot fully satisfy my mind, yet I shall tell what I think. The Prophets, after having publicly addressed the people, drew up a brief abstract of their discourse, and placed it on the gates of the temple, that all might see and become more fully acquainted with the prophecy. When it had been exposed for a sufficient number of days, it was removed by the ministers of the temple, and placed in the Treasury, that it might remain as a permanent record. In this way, it is probable, the books of the Prophets were compiled; and this may be inferred from the second chapter of the book of Habakkuk, if it be properly examined, and likewise from the eighth chapter of this Prophecy.

That these writings have come down to us through the agency of the Priests, whose duty it was to transmit the prophecies to posterity, . . . is a remarkable instance of the providence of God.⁵⁴

Historical and chronological materials were utilized in dealing with Acts 7:16.

Stephen saith, that the patriarchs were carried into the land of Canaan after they were dead. But Moses maketh mention only of the bones of Joseph (Gen. 50:13). And in Joshua 24:32, it is reported, that the bones of Joseph were buried without making any mention of the rest . . .

Some answer, that Moses speaketh of Joseph for honour's sake. . . . And it may be that there were empty tombs erected to the rest of the patriarchs. I can affirm nothing concerning this matter for a certainty, save only that this is either a speech wherein is synecdoche, or else that Luke rehearseth this not so much out of Moses, as according to the old fame; as the Jews had

⁵⁴Com. Isa. "Preface."

many things in times past from the fathers, which were delivered, as it were, from hand to hand. ⁵⁵

The necessity of understanding the historical and chronological background of the biblical books in order adequately to interpret them did not escape Calvin's attention. This can be seen in the following statement: "The import of Joel's teaching is evident, but not to know the times of Hosea would be a great loss, because many of his pages could not be explained without a knowledge of history." ⁵⁶ In expounding the prophets and Psalms, Calvin generally sought light from the historical circumstances of the writer he expounded.

Calvin noticed the ^{absence} Synoptics' absence of chronological concern and set forth an order of his own. Illustrations of this can be seen in his discussions of Matthew 4:5; 8:27; 9:18; 27:51; Luke 4:5; 19:1. Another example of this is his discussion of the problem of the original unity of the Sermon on the Mount.

For the design of both Evangelists was, to collect into one place the leading points of the doctrine of Christ, which related to a devout and holy life. . . . It is probable that this discourse was not delivered until Christ had chosen the twelve; but in attending to the order of time, which I saw that the Spirit of God had disregarded, I did not wish to be too precise. Pious and modest readers ought to be satisfied with having a brief summary of the doctrine of Christ placed before their eyes, collected out of

⁵⁵Com. Acts 7:16.

⁵⁶Com. Joel. "Preface."



his many and various discourses, the first of which was that in which he spoke to his disciples about true happiness.⁵⁷

The important question of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament can be considered as a part of the historical principle. Calvin readily saw that the words of the psalmists and prophets, while they not only admit of but demand "germinant and spring developments," were yet primarily applicable to the events and circumstances of their own days. The use made of them by Evangelists and Apostles he regarded as ἐκεργασία; as illustrative references; as skillful adaptation; as admissible transferences; as metaphoric allusions; as fair accommodations; as pious deflections. Calvin would not confuse the generality of a Divine Promise, or the yearning of faithful hearts for a promised Deliverer, with minute prophecies, which, torn from their context, would have had no significance for those to whom the prophets addressed their words.⁵⁸

Examples of Calvin's conception of the messianic prophecies can be found in numerous places. In discussing Joel 3:1, Calvin has the following illuminating statement:

"In those days, and at that time, when the Lord shall restore

⁵⁷Com. Matt. 5:1.

⁵⁸Frederic W. Farrar, History of Interpretation (London: Macmillan and Co., 1886), pp. 346-47.

the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, etc." This time the Jews limit to their return; they therefore think, that when liberty to return was granted them by Cyrus and Darius, what the Prophet declares here was then fulfilled; Christian doctors apply this prediction to the coming of Christ; but both interpret the words of the Prophet otherwise than the drift of the passage requires. The Prophet, no doubt, speaks here of the deliverance we have just noticed, and at the same time includes the kingdom of Christ; and this, we have seen in other parts, is very commonly done. While then the prophets testify that God would be the redeemer of his people, and promise deliverance from Babylonian exile, they lead the faithful, as it were, by a continuous train or course, to the kingdom of Christ. For what else was the Jewish restoration, but a prelude of that true and real redemption, afterwards effected by Christ? The Prophet then does not speak only of the coming of Christ, or of the return of the Jews, but includes the whole of redemption, which was only begun when the Lord restored his people from the Babylonian exile; it will then go on from the first coming of Christ to the last day. . . . In a word, the Prophet here shows, that God will not be a half Redeemer, but will continue to work until he completes everything necessary for the happy date of his Church and makes it in every respect perfect.⁵⁹

Another illustration of interest is found in the comment on Matthew 2:15.

"Out of Egypt have I called my son." Matthew says that a prediction was fulfilled. Some have thought, that the intention of the prophet was different from what is here stated, and have supposed the meaning to be that the Jews act foolishly in opposing and endeavoring to oppress the Son of God, because the Father "hath called him out of Egypt." In this way, they grievously pervert the words of the prophet, (Hos. 11:1) the design of which is, to establish a charge of ingratitude against the Jews, who, from their earliest infancy, and from the commencement of their history, had found God to be a kind and generous Father, and yet were provoking him by fresh offences. Beyond all question, the passage ought not to be restricted to the person of Christ: and

⁵⁹Com. Joel 3:1.

yet it is not tortured by Matthew, but skilfully applied to the matter in hand. . . . The words of the prophet import, that the nation was rescued from Egypt as from a deep whirlpool of death. Now, what was the redemption brought by Christ, but a resurrection from the dead, and the commencement of a new life? The light of salvation had been almost extinguished, when God begat the Church anew in the person of Christ. Then did the Church come out of Egypt in its head, as the whole body had been formerly brought out.

This analogy prevents us from thinking it strange, that any part of Christ's childhood was passed in Egypt . . . it serves rather to confirm our faith, that, as on a former occasion, so now again, the Church of God comes out of Egypt.⁶⁰

Another helpful insight into Calvin's approach to messianic prophecies is seen in his comment on Matthew 2:23.

"He shall be called a Nazarene." Matthew does not derive Nazarene from Nazareth, as if this were its strict and proper etymology, but only makes an allusion. . . . But it is asked, who are the prophets that gave this name to Christ? for there is no passage to be found that answers to the quotation . . . in what part of Scripture have the prophets stated this name would be given to Christ? Chrysostom, finding himself unable to loose the knot, cuts it by saying, that many books of the prophets have perished. But this answer has no probability.

Bucer has explained it, I think, more correctly than any other writer. He thinks that the reference is to a passage in the Book of Judges: "The child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb", (Judges 13:5). These words, no doubt, were spoken with regard to Samson. But Samson is called the "Redeemer" or "Deliverer" of the people, only because he was a figure of Christ, and because the salvation, which was accomplished by his instrumentality, was a sort of prelude of the full salvation, which was at length exhibited to the world by the Son of God. . . . To ex-

⁶⁰Com. Matt. 2:15.

press it more clearly, Christ is the original model: Samson is the inferior antitype. . . .

Matthew uses the word prophets in the plural number. This may be easily excused; for the Book of Judges was composed by many prophets.⁶¹

Although some would disagree, Fuhrmann maintains that

. . . nowhere does Calvin suggest a mechanistic accomplishment of "prophecies." The hina plerothe of the Evangelists, Calvin explains sometimes as realization of the general promise of the prophets, sometimes as "an illustrative reference of the Apostles' saying."⁶²

In any case, Calvin did recognize that it is necessary to utilize the historical principle if the Bible is to be properly interpreted.

The theological principle. For Calvin, as well as for the other Reformers, the theological principle of interpretation was very important. As indicated in the discussion of the four basic principles of interpretation, there are several aspects which can be subsumed under the theological principle. These include the importance of Christian experience, the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, the analogy of faith, and the literature of exegesis.

Calvin emphasized a living doctrine of faith. Christ and not

⁶¹ Com. Matt. 2:23.

⁶² Paul T. Fuhrmann, "Calvin, the Expositor of Scripture," Interpretation, VI, No. 2 (April, 1952), 201.

a book was the real center and object of faith. Commenting on John 15:26, Calvin stated that "The Spirit is said to testify of Christ, because he retains and fixes our faith in him alone, that we may not seek elsewhere any part of our salvation."⁶³ Calvin's exegesis is far from being pure circumstantialism. Fuhrmann has pointed out that in the 1541 edition of the Institutes Calvin emphasized the fact that it is true Christian faith which alone deserves to be called "faith." Mere knowledge of history is not enough.⁶⁴ In discussing Romans 10:9, Calvin pointed out that "St. Paul demands not merely an historical faith, but he makes the resurrection itself its end."⁶⁵

The inner witness of the Holy Spirit was important to Calvin, even in dealing with the problem of establishing the validity of various books in the New Testament. Only the cunning of Satan could have caused the reluctant acceptance of the epistle to the Hebrews, said Calvin, since it speaks so clearly of the priesthood of Christ and so fully explains that Christ is the end of the law, although its author is unknown.⁶⁶ Second Peter, although in a style that is unlike Peter's,

⁶³ Com. Jn. 15:26.

⁶⁴ Fuhrmann, op. cit., p. 200.

⁶⁵ Com. Rom. 10:9.

⁶⁶ Com. Heb. "Argument."

contains "nothing unworthy of Peter, so that it shows everywhere the power and grace of an apostolic spirit."⁶⁷ Although the author of a book may be unknown or the writing questioned by some part of the early church, Calvin accepted it upon recognition of apostolic doctrine or the majesty of the spirit. Although the appeal is not to the Spirit with that immediacy which he calls for in the Institutes, there is a recognition of the necessity of the Spirit witnessing to the believer's spirit that a writing is valid and apostolic. In fact, Dowey has insisted that oftentimes the historico-critical data concerning the books is arranged by Calvin after the book is accredited as divine on the testimony of the Spirit.⁶⁸

The principle that the obscure or difficult parts of Scripture should be interpreted in the light of that which is plain, was recognized and utilized by Calvin. Self-contradictions in Scripture were out of the question for Calvin. An example of this can be seen in his discussion of Christ's command to Peter to put up his sword. In commenting on Matthew 26:52, Calvin maintains that

We must make a distinction between a civil court and the court of conscience. . . . I deny that magistrates--who are God's

⁶⁷Com. II Pet. "Argument."

⁶⁸Edward A. Dowey, Jr., The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 123.

ministers, and by whom he executes his judgments--ought to be viewed as belonging to the ordinary rank. . . . By . . . Christ, this very power is expressly ascribed to them.⁶⁹

Calvin referred to his comments under Matthew 5:39 for a fuller discussion of this subject.

The best interpretation of this passage (Matthew 5:39 "Do not resist evil") that we can have is Paul, who enjoins us rather to "overcome evil by good" (Rom. 12:21) than contend with evil-doers. The present subject is retaliation. . . . Christ restrains our hands, as well as our minds, from revenge; but when any one has it in his power to protect himself and his property from injury, without exercising revenge, the words of Christ do not prevent him.⁷⁰

The touchstone of interpretation, the master-truth of the Scriptures, for the Reformers is generally conceded to be the conception of justification by faith. Calvin regarded the epistle to the Romans as the key, and with it he started on his prodigious work of exposition. Concerning Romans, Calvin said, ". . . when anyone gains a knowledge of this Epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture."⁷¹ In other words, the Scriptures must be read in the light of the mercy of God and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

⁶⁹Com. Matt. 26:52.

⁷⁰Com. Matt. 5:39.

⁷¹Com. Rom. "Argument."

Although Calvin affirmed that the whole of Scripture must be believed and is accredited by the Spirit, he maintained that a living and saving faith is established on the mercy of God as exhibited in a crucified and living Christ. This viewpoint is seen clearly in the Institutes.

Therefore, when we say that faith must rest upon the gratuitous promise, we do not deny that the believers embrace and accept the word of God in all its parts, but we designate the promise of mercy as its special object.⁷²

Commenting on Galatians 4:6, Calvin maintained that "faith looks at nothing but the mercy of God and a dead and risen Christ."⁷³ Other statements establishing the centrality of Christ and faith are found in many places in his Commentaries.

Everything which faith ought to contemplate is exhibited to us in Christ. Hence it follows that a bare and confused knowledge of God is not taken for faith, but that which is directed to Christ in order to seek God in him, and this cannot be except where the power and offices of Christ are understood.⁷⁴

For faith ought to look to him (the Son of God) alone; on him it relies, in him it rests and terminates. . . . Let us remember,

⁷²John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, translated by Henry Beveridge (2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1869), III, ii, 29. This source is hereafter designated by book, chapter, and section.

⁷³Com. Gal. 3:6.

⁷⁴Com. Eph. 3:12.

that true faith confines its view so entirely to Christ, that it neither knows, nor desires to know, anything else.⁷⁵

"It is Christ alone on whom, strictly speaking, faith ought to look."⁷⁶

In discussing I John 4:1-2, Calvin showed that John

. . . lays down a special mark by which true prophets might be better discerned from false. Yet he only repeats here what we have met with before, namely, Christ, for as he is the goal at which a right faith aims, so is he the stone on which all heretics stumble.⁷⁷

Calvin made constant reference to the literature of exegesis.

No one valued more highly than did Calvin the support of the early fathers and councils for his views but always with the reservation that both had made errors. A good statement of his position is found in a discussion of I John 4:1.

But here a difficult question arises, because if everyone has the right and liberty to judge, nothing can be settled as certain, but on the contrary the whole of religion will be vacillating. I reply, there is a twofold test of doctrine; private and public. The private test is that in which every individual establishes his own faith, when he wholly acquiesces in that doctrine which he knows has come from God. For conscience will never find a safe and tranquil anchorage except in God. The public test refers to the common consensus and polity of the church. For as there is danger that fanatical men may rise up who may presumptuously boast that they are endued with the Spirit of God, it is a necessary rem-

⁷⁵Com. Eph. 4:13.

⁷⁶Com. Jn. 3:16.

⁷⁷Com. I Jn. 4:1-2.

edy that the faithful should meet together and seek a basis of agreement in a holy and pure manner. But as the old proverb is true, "So many heads, so many opinions," it is doubtless a singular work of God when he subdues all our perverseness, makes us to agree to one thing, and unites us in the pure unity of faith.⁷⁸

In case of an obscure passage, when it is doubtful what sense ought to be adopted, there is no better way of arriving at the true meaning than for pious doctors to make a common inquiry by engaging in religious discussion.⁷⁹

It will be well to notice one additional statement. "Of the ancients who have, by their piety, learning, holiness, and also by their age, gained so much authority, . . . we ought to despise nothing of what they have adduced."⁸⁰

The homiletical principle. Calvin is noted for his emphasis on the homiletical or practical principle of exegesis.

One classic statement made by Calvin as to the necessity of the practical application of the teachings of the Scripture is found in the Dedication to the commentary on Romans.

I remember when three years ago we had a friendly converse as to the best mode of expounding Scripture, the plan which especially pleased you, seemed also to me the most entitled to approbation: we both thought that the chief excellency of

⁷⁸Com. I Jn. 4:1.

⁷⁹Loc. cit.

⁸⁰Com. Rom. "The Epistle Dedicatory."



an expounder consists in lucid brevity. And, indeed, since it is almost his only work to lay open the mind of the writer whom he undertakes to explain, the degree in which he leads away his readers from it, in that degree he goes astray from his purpose, and in a manner wanders from his own boundaries. Hence we expressed a hope, that from the number of those who strive at this day to advance the interest of theology by this kind of labour, some one would be found, who would study plainness, and endeavour to avoid the evil of tiring his readers with prolixity. . . . I have endeavoured so to regulate my style, that I might appear to aim at that model.⁸¹

The importance of the practical aim in exegesis can be seen in this further statement by Calvin.

We must endeavour, that, when we depart from the sentiments of our predecessors, we may not be stimulated by any humour for novelty, nor impelled by an lust for defaming others, nor instigated by hatred, nor tickled by any ambition, but constrained by necessity alone, and by the motive of seeking to do good; and then, when this is done in interpreting Scripture, less liberty will be taken in the principles of religion, in which God would have the minds of his people to be especially unanimous, and readers will easily perceive that I had both of these things in view.⁸²

Another indication of the practical emphasis sought by Calvin is indicated in his statement in the Preface to his commentary on the Psalms.

. . . I have not sought to please, unless in so far as I might at the same time be profitable to others. And, therefore, I have not only observed throughout a simple style of teaching, but in order to be removed the farther from all ostentation, I have also

⁸¹Com. Rom., loc cit.

⁸²Loc. cit.

generally abstained from refuting the opinions of others. . . . I have never touched upon opposite opinions, unless where there was reason to fear, that by being silent respecting them, I might leave my readers in doubt and perplexity.

At the same time, I am sensible that it would have been much more agreeable to the taste of many, had I heaped together a great mass of materials which has great show, and acquires fame for the writer; but I have felt nothing to be of more importance than to have a regard to the edification of the church.⁸³

Another aspect of the homiletical principle is the recognition of the fact that the interpreter must first see the application of the biblical message to its own time and then note the degree to which his particular situation is similar to that which the Bible presents. Calvin's recognition of this aspect of the homiletical principle is seen in his Preface to his commentary on Isaiah.

Hence we may learn in what manner the doctrine of the word should be handled and that we ought to imitate the Prophets, who conveyed the doctrine of the Law in such a manner as to draw from it advices, reproofs, threatenings and consolations, which they applied to the present conditions of the people. For although we do not daily receive a revelation of what we are to utter as a prediction, yet it is of high importance to us to compare the behaviour of the men of our own age with the behaviour of that ancient people; and from their histories and examples we ought to make known the judgments of God; such as, that what he formerly punished he will also punish with equal severity in our own day, for he is always like himself. Such wisdom let godly teachers acquire, if they would wish to handle the doctrine of the Prophets with any good result.⁸⁴

⁸³Com. Ps. "Preface."

⁸⁴Com. Isa. "Preface."

Although Calvin insisted that the Bible should be studied in its historical setting and that its words should be taken at their face value, he also agreed that it was legitimate and proper to extract all the teachings possible and give it the widest application. The primary teaching of the Scripture was to be allowed to illuminate all that was related to the original situation and to a comparable present situation.

Other examples could be listed to show that Calvin recognized the four basic principles of exegesis. It is believed, however, that the ones listed will be sufficient to indicate that Calvin did recognize the four basic principles which have been suggested in this study.

III. HISTORICAL CONDITIONING OF EXEGETICAL PRINCIPLES

Basic to a proper understanding of any significant exegete is the recognition of the fact that all exegetes are historically conditioned in their use of exegetical principles. A number of the contributors to the World Council of Churches Symposium on Biblical Authority for Today have emphasized this fact. According to Clarence Craig,

There is always the danger of eisegesis, reading into the Bible the ideas which we have received from elsewhere and then receiving them back with the authority with which we have come to surround the book.⁸⁵

⁸⁵Richardson and Schweitzer, op. cit., p. 40.

Alan Richardson affirms that

The Anglican attitude (like that of every other tradition) can be understood only against the background of a particular history. It was not evolved in an abstract or leisurely manner (any more than was, for instance, Lutheranism) by theologians sitting in their libraries. It was hammered out of the midst of history. . . . It is in such periods of historical decision that insights are born and attitudes are formed . . . a truth which we learn from the Bible itself, but also from Church history. As with every other tradition, we can understand why Anglicans think like Anglicans (and not like Lutherans or Presbyterians) only by understanding something of Anglican history. The mutual understanding of one another's tradition is a task of the highest ecumenical importance. A confessional position cannot be understood apart from its general economic, political and social background.⁸⁶

In his significant book The Heritage of the Reformation Wilhelm Pauck contends:

Just as the character of a person can be known only in connection with his acts in concrete situations, so the nature of a movement in human history can be comprehended only by a constantly fresh attention to the inner and outer circumstances in which it has unfolded itself. . . . The nature of a movement in history is conditioned by the living realities through which it proceeds.⁸⁷

Pauck continues:

It was not until modern men became consciously and critically aware of the historical nature of all human life that the relation between the "old" and the "new" amidst the changes of tradition was understood. Then it became clear that also the life of

⁸⁶Ibid., pp. 113-14.

⁸⁷Wilhelm Pauck, The Heritage of the Reformation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), p. 131.

the church is historically determined, i. e., that what prevails among believers of a certain time as the definition of the nature of the church and as the expression of this nature in ecclesiastical forms and practices is the result of decision which they have made in their specific situation under the guidance of their faith.⁸⁸

IV. HISTORICAL CONDITIONING OF CALVIN'S USE OF EXEGETICAL PRINCIPLES

In the light of the fact that all exegetes are historically conditioned, the statement of Hunter is undoubtedly correct:

Though Calvin himself would have asserted that his theology had only one source and fountain, namely the Scriptures, it requires no minute study of his works to see that he was strongly acted upon by other influences.⁸⁹

Thus, in order to judge Calvin correctly, one must remember the environment in which he lived and the work which he was attempting to perform. Many factors helped to condition his use of exegetical principles. To understand properly and evaluate correctly Calvin's exegetical contribution, it is necessary to examine these factors and note the extent to which they influenced his use of basic exegetical principles.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 54.

⁸⁹A. Mitchell Hunter, The Teaching of Calvin (second edition, revised; London: James Clark and Co., 1950), p. 38.

In this particular study the factors which influenced Calvin's use of the linguistic and historical principles of exegesis will be considered. Before beginning this more detailed study of the factors influencing these two basic principles, some brief statements about factors influencing the theological and homiletical principles will be made and the reasons for concentrating on the linguistic and historical principles will be noted.

It is rather obvious that the theological principle, as it has been defined in this study, was influenced by and built upon Calvin's own vital Christian experience. The living Christ was undoubtedly the objective basis of Calvin's Christian experience and Christian knowledge. As Dowey⁹⁰ has pointed out, Calvin's lofty and exclusively Christo-centric doctrine of faith could have come only from a living faith in Jesus Christ. The fact that in Calvin's experience saving faith was rooted exclusively in Jesus Christ, undoubtedly caused him to utilize rather extensively the principle known as "analogy of faith," which principle is an aspect of the theological principle of exegesis.⁹¹ Calvin's experience of Christ as the exclusive object of sav-

⁹⁰Dowey, op. cit., pp. 160-61.

⁹¹Cf. Peter Brunner, Vom Glauben bei Calvin (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1925), p. 139.

ing faith also influenced his exegesis of the Old Testament. For Calvin, Christ was also the object of faith in the Old Testament period.

The only difference between the Old Testament period and the New Testament period was the lesser degree of knowledge caused by the more obscure manner in which Christ was presented.⁹²

According to Calvin, anyone who was in a right relationship with God must have had some knowledge of Christ, even though it was obscure. Calvin accounts for ^{Naaman} Namaan the Syrian, Cornelius the Roman, and the Ethiopian eunuch by this doctrine of "preparatory" implicit faith.⁹³

Calvin's experience of the "inner testimony of the Holy Spirit" as an illuminating and certifying power, was unquestionably the basis of his development and utilization of the principle of the "inner testimony of the Holy Spirit." Lobstein,⁹⁴ Doumergue,⁹⁵ and Pannier⁹⁶

⁹²Dowey, op. cit., p. 166.

⁹³II, II, 32.

⁹⁴P. Lobstein, "La connaissance religieuse d'après Calvin," Revue de théologie et de philosophie, XLII (1909), 53-110.

⁹⁵Émile Doumergue, Jean Calvin, les hommes et les choses de son temps (Lausanne: Georges Bridel, 1910), Vol. IV.

⁹⁶Jacques Pannier, Le Témoignage du Saint-Esprit (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1893).

have given careful study to this problem. Other writers such as Seeberg⁹⁷ and Warfield⁹⁸ have also dealt with this aspect of the historical principle of exegesis. Dowey⁹⁹ has given an unusually fresh and detailed analysis of Calvin's use of the principles of "illumination" and the "inner testimony of the Holy Spirit" in his monograph The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology.

The literature of exegesis, including the writings of the Fathers and other Reformers, unquestionably influenced Calvin's use of the theological principle. A detailed analysis of this influence would demand separate treatment and is beyond the scope of this study.

The homiletical or practical principle of biblical exegesis, as it has been defined in this study, is a rather obvious principle. The factors which influenced Calvin's use of this principle also are rather obvious. Furthermore, a worth-while analysis of these factors would lead into areas which have widespread ramifications. Such an analysis demands a separate study.

Calvin's use of the homiletical or practical principle of exe-

⁹⁷Reinhold Seeberg, Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte (Erlangen: A. Deicherische Verlagsbuchhandlung Werner Scholl, 1920).

⁹⁸B. B. Warfield, Calvin and Calvinism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 70-130.

⁹⁹Dowey, op. cit., pp. 106-24, 172-91.

gesis was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that the Reformation movement was in dire need of some leader to organize and solidify its initial victories. Calvin apparently saw this need and attempted to apply the principles of the Bible--the exclusive rule of faith and practice--to the practical life of Geneva and other places. In meeting this need, Calvin's exegesis, although not allegorical, tended to be very practical. On the basis of biblical exegesis, Calvin sought to develop church polity, a method of discipline, and a plan for church-state relations.

The fact that Protestants were relatively few in number and were constantly being beset by enemies and traitors influenced Calvin to apply the biblical promises of assurance, encouragement, and ultimate victory to the practical needs of the people.

These influences on Calvin's use of the homiletical or practical principle of biblical exegesis have been discussed, either directly or indirectly, by numerous writers including Doumergue,¹⁰⁰ Clavier,¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰Doumergue, op. cit., Vol. II (1902), Vol. IV (1910), Vol. V (1917), Vol. VI (1927).

¹⁰¹Henri Clavier, Études sur la Calvinisme (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1936).

Warfield,¹⁰² Dowey,¹⁰³ Lobstein,¹⁰⁴ Schaff,¹⁰⁵ Pauck,¹⁰⁶ and Stuermann.¹⁰⁷

The two principles which probably were conditioned the most by Calvin's particular historical background, training, and controversies are the linguistic and the historical principles. These are two primary principles which are basic for any exegetical work. The remainder of this study is devoted primarily to a consideration and evaluation of the factors influencing Calvin's use of these two important principles of biblical exegesis.

¹⁰²Warfield, op. cit.

¹⁰³Dowey, op. cit.

¹⁰⁴Lobstein, op. cit.

¹⁰⁵Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923).

¹⁰⁶Pauck, The Heritage of the Reformation, op. cit.

¹⁰⁷Walter E. Stuermann, A Critical Study of Calvin's Concept of Faith (Tulsa, Okla., published privately by the author, 1952).

CHAPTER III

FACTORS INFLUENCING CALVIN'S USE OF THE LINGUISTIC PRINCIPLE

I. DEVELOPMENTS IN TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Introduction. With the revival of learning in the West and with the invention of printing, the period of modern criticism began. The literary and educational side of this comprehensive cultural movement--the Humanist side in the more restricted sense of the term--is of prime significance in relation to the Reformation. Humanism, which was the fruit of the quickened interest from the fourteenth century onwards in the ancient classic literature, was the antithesis of scholasticism with its predilection for abstract thought, the dialectic pursuit of truth. As a scholarly movement it was engaged with the study of literature and the collection and publication of the manuscripts which had survived in the East and West.¹ The Humanist movement prepared the way for the application of the historical-critical method to the study of ecclesiastical dogmas and institutions, of the Scriptures in the original languages, and of the early history of

¹James Mackinnon, The Origins of the Reformation (New York: Longmans Green, 1939), p. 353.

Christianity. It gave a new force to the appeal "back to the sources" as the test of creed and ecclesiastical constitution. It intensified the reaction from tradition. Moreover it trained many of the men who were to become leaders of the evangelical Reformation.² Before long the movement produced an imposing array of notable scholars in Lefevre, Guillaume Budé, Danes, Vatable, Berquin, Toussain, Robert Etienne, Berauld, Olivetan, Dolet, Postel, Ramus, J. C. Scaliger, and many more. Budé has been called the "Restorer of Greek Studies" in France, and his scholarship led him incidentally to criticize the text of the Vulgate. Even in some of the colleges of the universities the movement succeeded in asserting itself, notably in that of La Marche, in which Cordier, one of Calvin's masters, taught.³ Lefevre is the French counterpart of Reuchlin and Erasmus in the application of the critical method of Valla to the Scriptures. When Lefevre returned to France, Calvin visited him, in the year 1534.⁴

The development of textual criticism. The development of

²Loc. cit.

³Ibid., p. 372.

⁴Ibid., p. 414.

textual criticism undoubtedly influenced Calvin and caused him to give more attention to the textual aspect of the linguistic factor of exegesis.

To appreciate both the direct and indirect influence which the development of textual criticism had on Calvin, one should note some of the developments in the field of textual criticism just prior to and contemporary with his activity as an exegete. For the purposes of this study consideration will be restricted to the consideration of some aspects of the textual criticism of the New Testament.

From the time of Jerome (d. 420) the Latin Vulgate had been the generally accepted text. Jerome had revised the text of the old Latin on the basis of the Greek, changing the received text as little as possible.

However, a new day was coming. In the field of textual criticism, especially with reference to the New Testament, the new era was introduced by Erasmus. There is no one whose writings showed a more distinct and decided emancipation from untenable traditions than did those of Erasmus.⁵ From the time of Erasmus on, the appeal to Scripture which would be recognized by scholars would not be

⁵Frederick W. Farrar, History of Interpretation (London: Macmillan and Co., 1886), p. 316.

to this version or that, but to the Scriptures in the original languages,⁶

Although the Complutensian Polyglott was the first Greek Testament to be printed, it was not the first to be published. That honor belongs to the New Testament of Erasmus. Froben of Basle, learning of the work which Ximenes had in hand, applied to Erasmus, the outstanding scholar of the day, to furnish him with a Greek New Testament as speedily as possible. The edition was ready by the first of March, 1516. The Greek text was accompanied by a Latin translation and some notes which Erasmus had had in hand before Froben's proposal.

Work so rapidly produced could not rest on any great accumulation of material, and although the publisher's preface speaks of the use of many ancient MSS. and of the quotations of all the most important Fathers, it would appear that in reality only a few manuscripts were employed--those, namely, which lay ready to the editor's hand at Basle. (Evan. 1--a better class Ms. of the eleventh century, was only occasionally followed, Evan. 2 (of the fifteenth century) was principally used for the Gospels, Act. 2 (of the thirteenth or fourteenth century) for the Acts and Epistles, and Apoc. 1 (of the twelfth century) alone for the Apocalypse.⁷

For the most part the manuscripts used by Erasmus were neither ancient nor good. The edition of Erasmus consequently did

⁶L. E. Binns, The Reformers and the Bible (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1923), p. 16.

⁷Frederick G. Kenyon, Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament (London: Macmillan and Co., 1901), p. 228.

not have very much critical value and is inferior in this respect to the Complutensian; yet it has exercised a far greater influence on the history of the New Testament text. It had six years' start on its rival; and being issued in a single volume of reasonable size and price, it had a far wider circulation than the six-volume Complutensian. Erasmus states that 3,300 copies of his first two editions were issued.

Aldus reprinted it at Venice in 1518 in conjunction with the Septuagint. In 1519 Erasmus projected a revised edition, correcting many misprints, and inserted improved readings from Evan. 3 (equals Act. 3, Paul. 3). Three more editions appeared in his lifetime--in 1522, 1527, and 1535. The 1522 edition is notable for its introduction of the passage relating to the Three Heavenly Witnesses (I John 5:7-8). Erasmus included it on a weak basis in this edition, and the passage consequently found its way into the Textus Receptus. Each of these contains some alterations, that of 1527 being noticeable for its use of the Complutensian edition and for its introduction of the Vulgate text by the side of the Greek and Erasmus' Latin. The edition of 1527 may be considered as Erasmus' definitive text. The edition of 1535 shows very few alterations.⁸

There has been considerable sarcasm about the work of Eras-

⁸Ibid., p. 229.

mus. Erasmus, however, actually did collate manuscripts on critical principles, although some of his critical principles were not of the soundest type. He was able, here and there, by means of grammatical and historical knowledge superior to that of his contemporaries, to improve the text by conjectural emendation. His wide reading in the early fathers stood him in good stead in elucidating and in restoring the text.⁹

Other publishers followed in the footsteps of Ximenes and Froben in issuing editions of the New Testament in Greek, but for the most part they contented themselves with reproducing the text of Erasmus.¹⁰

The first to prepare a really critical edition of the Greek New Testament, one based on a collation of manuscripts in a more complete way, was Simon de Colines (Colinaeus), the father-in-law of the Parisian printer Robert Stephens (Estienne). In his edition, which appeared in 1534, he adopted for the first time a number of readings that are now generally accepted.¹¹

⁹Henry Preserved Smith, Erasmus (New York: Harper and Bros., 1923), pp. 164-65.

¹⁰Kenyon, op. cit., pp. 229-30.

¹¹Eberhard Nestle, Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the Greek New Testament (Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1901), p. 7.

The next who deserves mention is Robert Estienne, of Paris, whose name was Latinized by himself as Stephanus and quite unnecessarily Anglicized by some as Stephens. His first edition appeared in 1546, his second in 1549, both being attractive little volumes printed from a new font of small Greek type with a text compounded from Erasmus, the Complutensian, and fifteen manuscripts. [^] Only the two latter authorities are acknowledged in the Preface. It contained a revised text and gave in the margin various readings from his fifteen manuscripts and the Complutensian. One of his manuscripts was the Codex Bezae; most of the rest have been identified with minuscule manuscripts in the Paris Library. The text itself shows a greater approximation to that of Erasmus than its predecessors. It is from this third edition of Stephanus that the Textus Receptus, found in our ordinary Greek Testaments, is derived with some slight alterations. Therefore, it is easy to see why this edition is so important in the history of the Bible text. A fourth edition was produced by Stephanus in 1551, but it practically reproduced the text of 1550 with the addition of the Vulgate and the Latin version of Erasmus. The only important feature of the fourth edition is the fact that it divided the text for the first time into verses. ¹²

¹²Kenyon, op. cit., p. 230.

[^] Have you not omitted here a reference to the third edition of 1550, to which the sentences which follow apply?

Following Stephen, the French theologian Théodore de Bèze, the friend and successor of Calvin in Geneva, prepared, between 1565 and 1611, four folio and six octavo editions. Beza ^{seemed} also, in the preparation of his Geneva edition, to have been the first to collate the oriental versions.¹³ Beza was the owner of two very important manuscripts, the Codex Bezae (D) of the Gospels and Acts, and the Codex Claromontanus (D 2) of the Pauline Epistles.¹⁴

Luther's utilization of textual criticism. During Luther's stay at Wartburg he had with him a copy of the Vulgate printed by Froben in Basel in 1509 and a Greek New Testament. Just what edition of the Greek New Testament he possessed is a matter of dispute. Many peculiarities in the printing of Luther's New Testament of 1522 would indicate that the work of Erasmus must have been before him. Freitag was undoubtedly right when he stated that the Greek text of the 1519 edition of Erasmus was before Luther from the very beginning of his work of translating.¹⁵

It was also probable that he had the Epistolae Pauli of Faber

¹³Nestle, op. cit., pp. 9-10.

¹⁴Kenyon, loc. cit.

¹⁵M. Reu, Luther's German Bible (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1934), pp. 149-50.

Stapulensis, of 1512 or 1515, and lexicons like Aleander's Lexicon Graeco-Latinum, that had been issued at Basel in 1519.¹⁶

In an effort to comprehend fully the contents of the Bible, Luther apparently used all the scientific helps available at the time:

. . . reliable editions of the original text (even manuscripts are mentioned), grammars, and lexicons were all used most faithfully; all available translations were consulted; the peculiarities of the Hebrew and Greek languages were assimilated; others were taken into counsel; the whole usage of the language was considered; single passages were compared with others of similar nature, and finally the entire statement was illuminated by the light of Christ and by the experience of Christ that the Holy Ghost had worked in his own heart.¹⁷

Calvin and textual criticism. Unquestionably the widespread interest in textual criticism during the sixteenth century influenced Calvin's utilization of the textual and grammatical aspect of the linguistic principle of biblical exegesis. Calvin's high view of inspiration, which maintained that the Bible as an original document was divinely inspired, undoubtedly caused him to devote himself even more diligently to "lower criticism" in order to establish a pure text. This aspect of the problem will be considered in connection with the factors influencing Calvin's use of the historical principle. The concern here is with the factors influencing his use of the linguistic factor. /H. H. H.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 150-51.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 213.

It is evident that Calvin, to a large extent, utilized the means that were available in the field of textual criticism. Calvin cited Erasmus no less than 150 times as a critical or exegetical authority.¹⁸ He industriously consulted such manuscripts as were then procurable. In his comments on I Corinthians 7:29 there is an instance of a change of mind regarding the exegesis of a passage as the result of seeing a manuscript which had not previously been before him:

In my first translation, I had followed a manuscript, to which (as I afterwards discovered) not one of the many others gave any countenance. I have accordingly deemed it proper to insert the particle because, to make the meaning more apparent, and in accordance also with the reading in some ancient copies.¹⁹

Calvin's humanistic background made him familiar with the processes employed in settling the texts of classical authors; and naturally he used the same methods in his determination of the text of the biblical books. His practice here is marked by a combination of freedom and sobriety. His decisions, though often wrong, as they could not fail to be in the state of the knowledge of the transmission of the New Testament text at the time, always displayed good sense,

¹⁸CO, LIX, 76.

¹⁹Com. I Cor. 7:29.

balance, and trained judgment.²⁰

Calvin did not find John 8:1-11 in some ancient manuscripts. He accepted it, however, because of its apostolic spirit and helpful lessons.

It is plain enough that this passage was unknown anciently to the Greek Churches; and some conjecture that it has been brought from some other place and inserted here. But as it has always been received by the Latin Churches, and is found in many old Greek manuscripts, and contains nothing unworthy of an Apostolic Spirit, there is no reason why we should refuse to apply it to our advantage.²¹

In other places Calvin recognized that a word may have been added to the text. An illustration of this is found in his discussion of Ephesians 2:5: "Whether the words, 'by grace ye are saved,' have been inserted by another hand, I know not; but as they are perfectly agreeable to the context, I am quite willing to receive them as written by Paul."²² Comments on Hebrews 9:1 afford still another example:

Some copies read, *πρώτη σκηνή*, the first tabernacle; but I suspect that there is a mistake as to the word "tabernacle"; nor do I doubt but that some unlearned reader, not finding a noun to the adjective, and in his ignorance applying to the tabernacle what has been said of the covenant, unwisely added the word *σκηνή*, tabernacle. I indeed greatly wonder that the mis-

²⁰Com. Jn. 8:1.

²¹Com. Jn. 8:3.

²²Com. Eph. 2:5.

take had so prevailed that it is found in the Greek copies almost universally.²³

One more example, the one found in James 4:7, can be added:

Many copies have introduced here the following sentence "Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." But in others it is not found. Erasmus suspects that it was first a note in the margin, and afterwards crept into the text. It may have been so, though it is not unsuitable to the passage.²⁴

Errors in detail were also noticed by Calvin and he often suggested that the text be corrected. An example of this is found in a discussion of Matthew 27:9: "The passage itself plainly shows that the name of Jeremiah has been put down by mistake instead of Zechariah, (11:13), for in Jeremiah we find nothing of this sort, nor anything that even approaches to it."²⁵ Another example of his consideration of textual problems is found in I John 5:7:

The whole of this verse has been by some omitted. Jerome thinks this has happened through design rather than through mistake. Since the Greek codices do not agree with themselves, I scarcely dare reach a conclusion. Yet, as the context flows most smoothly if this clause is added, and I see that it stands in the best codices and those of the most approved credit, I also willingly adopt it.²⁶

²³Com. Heb. 9:1.

²⁴Com. James 4:7.

²⁵Com. Matt. 27:9.

²⁶Com. I Jn. 5:7.

When puzzled by difficulties, he followed the Humanist procedure in dealing with a classical text and felt free to suggest that there may be a mendum in voce. An example of this is seen in his discussion of Matthew 23:35:

But whether Jehoiada had two names, or whether (as Jerome thinks) there is a mistake in the word, there can be no doubt as to the fact, that Christ refers to that impious stoning of Zechariah which is recorded in 2 Chronicles 24:21, 22.²⁷

Another illustration of this approach is found in comments on Matthew 27:9 where Calvin assumed Jeremiah to be a corrupt reading.

Ordinarily Calvin followed the current text. He exercised, however, a free and independent judgment and recognized his right to engage in textual criticism. A good example of the fact that he felt free to exercise independent judgment is seen in his treatment of 1 John 5:7. He came forward on scientific grounds against the Vulgate. The decree of Trent that this version must be followed as authentic, he found silly; and reverence for it as if it had fallen down from heaven, ludicrous.²⁸

And so we see that Calvin did use textual criticism and did

²⁷Com. Matt. 23:35.

²⁸Warfield, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God," Doumergue, et al., Calvin and the Reformation (London: Fleming H. Revell, 1909), p. 234.

exercise himself as a humanistic and critical scholar on the text which he had in hand. Sometimes he flew directly in the face of the conservative opinion of the age.

The critical apparatus of Valla, Erasmus, and Bude, which was utilized in an attempt to establish the true text of Scripture, won Calvin's strong approval. He used their books as authorities, though he never failed to challenge any of their conclusions when he thought they were erroneous. The important point is that he approved their method as such. The human element played a rather important role when Valla used his own judgment in determining which codices were the more reliable, and much more so when he made free use of conjecture in establishing the "correctness" of the text. Yet Calvin conceded the rightness of this method, which was followed so much more learnedly by Erasmus.²⁹ A fair example of Calvin's reference to the critics is seen in his statements in discussing Acts 26:28-29:

Interpreters expound this *εὐ ολίγω* diversely. Valla thought that it ought to be translated, "Thou dost almost make me a Christian." Erasmus doth translate it "a little." The old interpreter dealeth more plainly "in a little"; . . .³⁰

After a survey of his exegetical work it is not difficult to

²⁹Quirinus Breen, John Calvin: A Study in French Humanism.

³⁰Com. Acts 26:28.

agree with Warfield when he states that

We feel ourselves in the hands of one who is sanely and sagely scrutinizing the text with which he is dealing from the point of view of a scholar accustomed to deal with ancient texts, whose confidence in its general integrity represents the well-grounded conclusion of a trained judgment. His occasional remarks on the text, and his rare suggestion of a corruption, are indicia of the alertness of his general scrutiny of the text and serve to assure to us that this acceptance of it as a whole as sound is not merely inert acquiescence in tradition, but represents the calm judgment of an instructed intelligence.³¹

Although Calvin did not regard the work of critics like Valla, Bude, and Erasmus as an end in itself, he was undoubtedly influenced in his use of the linguistic factor by their work. He was well aware that no theologian could afford to work without their achievement as a background.

II. HUMANIST TRAINING

Linguistic training.

1. Widespread interest in biblical languages. During the time of Calvin, the first half of the sixteenth century, the desire to learn Greek and Hebrew was little less than a passion. Reuchlin (1455-1523) had private pupils in Hebrew many years before a profes-

³¹Warfield, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,"
loc. cit.

sorship was established in this language. In 1518 at Wittenberg, Melancton was thronged by students eager to learn Greek. Two years earlier Erasmus wrote that the generality of the scholars whom he met in Basel understood Greek. A little later Zwingli reported that many of his colleagues in Zurich knew Hebrew and Greek.³²

There were ten or more Hebrew grammars and lexicons published in the first half of the sixteenth century in Switzerland and Germany--an amazing number when one considers the labor necessary to such a work at that time and the great expense of printing books in Hebrew.³³

This awakened interest in the biblical languages was largely directed toward the Bible. Reuchlin's aim in all his Hebrew studies was to promote the knowledge of God.³⁴

2. Calvin's training. After attending college in Paris where he had an incomparable teacher of Latin, M. Cordier, Calvin studied law at Orleans. While at Orleans he studied Greek from Melchior Wolmar, a Lutheran to whom he later dedicated his exposition of

³²G. H. Gilbert, Interpretation of the Bible (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1908), p. 190.

³³Ibid., p. 191.

³⁴Loc. cit.

II Corinthians. The following quotation from the Dedication of his commentary on II Corinthians reveals his debt to Wolmar.

Under your direction and tuition, I conjoined with a study of law Greek literature, of which you were at the time a most celebrated professor. . . . I was initiated by you in the rudiments . . . which were afterwards of great advantage to me. Hence I could not satisfy myself without leaving to posterity some memorial of my gratitude, and at the same time rendering to you some fruit, such as it is, of your labour.³⁵

Returning to Paris, Calvin continued Greek under Pierre Danes (Danesius) at the Royal College. Danes was younger than Toussain but was accorded the first title of professor regius of Greek. Danes began the study of Greek at the age of about twenty, and during the next thirteen or fourteen years he perfected himself as a Hellenist, at the same time amassing a financial fortune. He was an ardent admirer of Aristotle, and he expounded mainly the Organon at the College Royal. He spared himself no pains to give his best to the students of his choice. Henri Estienne, one of his students, left a record full of praise for the master.³⁶ A Latin rhyme was circulated that affirmed that Danes was superior to the great French Grecian, Guillaume Budé himself.³⁷ Danes was a man of encyclopedic learn-

³⁵Com. II Cor. "The Epistle Dedicatory."

³⁶Breen, op. cit., p. 133.

³⁷John T. McNeill, "The Debt of the Reformation to the Renaissance," Religion in the Making, II, No. 3 (March, 1942), 211.

ing, of whom it was said that

He embraced at the same time Greek and Latin philosophy, rhetoric, mathematics, philosophy, medicine and theology, having one of the most profound and powerful minds of that Renaissance which created so many universal geniuses.³⁸

Calvin himself makes no explicit assertion about his knowledge of Hebrew; and Simon, the early critic of the Pentateuch, denied that he knew enough for practical purposes. But the fact that he knew Hebrew has been admitted even by his enemies. He was a Reformer to whom Roman controversialists allowed an adequate acquaintance with the original languages of the Scripture. Many persons, including Diestel and Tholuck, paid tribute to his linguistic endowments.³⁹ In fact, his mastery of Hebrew, though never displayed, is felt throughout his commentaries on the Old Testament. Beza, his biographer, after saying that Calvin was a friend of Grynæus and Capito, adds "seseque Hebraicis literis dedit."⁴⁰ Details about Calvin's knowledge of He-

³⁸A. Mitchell Hunter, "The Education of Calvin," Evangelical Quarterly, IX (1937), 24.

³⁹Tholuck, "Calvin as an Interpreter of the Holy Scriptures," John Calvin, Commentary on Joshua (Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1854), pp. 363-67.

⁴⁰Quoted by George Adam Smith, Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament (second edition; New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1901), p. 240.

brew are given in the study by Baumgartner, Calvin Hébraisant,⁴¹

This is a detailed study as to where and how Calvin learned his Hebrew.

The Dedicatory Epistle of Calvin's commentary on Romans is dedicated to Simon Grynaeus. Grynaeus was a recognized scholar known all over Europe. Calvin mentions that "you are intimately known to me by familiar intercourse."⁴²

At Paris Calvin studied Hebrew under Vatable. Vatable shared with Danes a post in the Royal College instituted by Francis I in 1530. According to Doumergue,⁴³ under the pseudonym of Martianus Lucianus, Calvin took up residence in Basel and plunged into his studies once again. Here he perfected himself in Hebrew, probably putting himself under the tuition of Sebastian Münster, the best Hebraist of his day, himself a pupil of a converted Jew who was a celebrated Hebraist. Baumgartner⁴⁴ confirms this statement.

While exiled from Geneva, Calvin lived in Strassburg. Here

⁴¹Antoine J. Baumgartner, Calvin Hébraisant et Interprète de L'ancien Testament (Paris: 1889).

⁴²Com. Rom. "The Epistle Dedicatory."

⁴³Doumergue, Jean Calvin, les hommes et les choses de son temps (Lausanne: George Bridel, 1899), I, 504 f.

⁴⁴Baumgartner, op. cit.

he continued his studies by receiving instruction from Martin Bucer and Capito, men of the highest scholarship, whose friendship he had formed at Basel. Capito, author of a widely used Hebrew grammar, was the third eminent Hebraist by whom Calvin had been instructed.⁴⁵ The details are given by Baumgartner.⁴⁶

3. Calvin's utilization of linguistic training. It is not necessary for the purposes of this study, to attempt a detailed analysis of Calvin's use of the Greek and Hebrew. He utilized these languages hundreds of times in his Commentaries. A few general statements and representative examples will show that his linguistic training undoubtedly made him more conscious of the importance of the linguistic factor and more effective in his utilization of this factor. In fact, Calvin himself gave a definite statement about the importance of the linguistic principle:

... It is important to know how Holy Scripture uses words. Surely we need not stop simply at words, but we cannot understand the teaching of God unless we know what procedure, style,

⁴⁵John Calvin, Tracts Relating to the Reformation (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Printing Co., 1844), I, xxvii. The three volumes of Calvin's Tracts prepared by the Calvin Translation Society are hereafter designated as Calvin's Tracts, volume and page.

⁴⁶Baumgartner, op. cit.

and language he uses.⁴⁷

Calvin's Commentaries reveal his knowledge of Greek. He often objected to current renderings. In discussing I Timothy 1:3, he objected to the translation given by Erasmus. "The translation given by Erasmus, (sectari.) 'to follow,' does not satisfy me; because it might be understood to apply to the hearers."⁴⁸ Another objection to a rendering is found in his discussion of Ephesians 1:10:

In the old translation it is rendered (instaurare) restore; to which Erasmus has added (summam) comprehensively. I have chosen to abide closely by the meaning of the Greek word ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι, because it is more agreeable to the context. The meaning appears to me to be, that out of Christ all things were disordered, and that through him they have been restored to order.⁴⁹

Sometimes Calvin offers better and more original renderings of the original languages:

To them indeed, who by perseverance, etc.: literally, patience; by which word something more is expressed. For it is perseverance, when one is not wearied in constantly doing good; but patience also is required in the saints, by which they may continue firm, though oppressed with various trials.⁵⁰

⁴⁷John Calvin, The Deity of Christ and Other Sermons (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), p. 13.

⁴⁸Com. I Tim. 1:3.

⁴⁹Com. Eph. 1:10.

⁵⁰Com. Rom. 2:7.

Another example is as follows:

Erasmus gives a different rendering to this effect, "that by these things the testimony of Christ was confirmed in them; that is, by knowledge and by the word." The words however convey another meaning and if they are not wrested, the meaning is easy--that God has sealed the truth of his gospel among the Corinthians, for the purpose of confirming it. 51

In dealing with Greek words, Calvin had a consciousness of mastery, and felt free to agree or disagree with scholars. The one to whom he often referred is Erasmus. In discussing John 1:1, he commended the rendering by Erasmus:

(ἐν ῥήματι) I wonder what induced the Latins to render ὁ λόγος by verbum, (the word;) for that would rather have been the translation of τὸ ῥήμα. But granting that they had some plausible reason, still it cannot be denied that Sermo (the speech) would have been far more appropriate. Hence it is evident, what barbarous tyranny was exercised by the theologians of the Sorbonne, who teased and stormed at Erasmus in such a manner, because he had changed a single word for the better. 52

In discussing John 3:3, Calvin chose to disagree with Erasmus:

ω | Erasmus, adopting the opinion of Cyril has improperly translated the adverb ἀνωθεν, from above, and renders the clause thus: unless a man be born from above. The Greek word, I own, is ambiguous; but we know that Christ conversed with Nicodemus in the Hebrew language. There would then have been no room for the ambiguity which occasioned the mistake of Nicodemus, and led him into childish scruples about a second birth of the flesh. He, therefore, understood Christ to have said

51 Com. 1 Cor. 1:6.

52 Com. Jn. 1:1.

nothing else than that a man must be born again, before he is admitted into the kingdom of God.⁵³

In I Corinthians 8:4 Calvin disagreed with Erasmus and favored the

Vulgate rendering:

As to the words, Erasmus reads thus--"an idol has no existence." I prefer the rendering of the old translation--An idol is nothing. For the argument is this--that an idol is nothing, inasmuch as there is but one God; for it follows admirably--"if there is no other God besides our God, then an idol is an empty dream, and mere vanity."⁵⁴

Utilizing the linguistic factor, Calvin brought out in a helpful way the meaning of certain basic terms such as "gospel." In "The Argument" section of his commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, Calvin has an excellent development of the term "gospel." Commenting on the term "gospel," Calvin pointed out that it is

. . . justly called a good and joyful message, for it contains perfect happiness. Its object is to commence the reign of God, and by means of our deliverance from the corruption of the flesh, and of our renewal by the Spirit, to conduct us to the heavenly glory.

Calvin further affirmed that

It is evident that the word "Gospel" applies properly to the New Testament, and that those writers are chargeable with a want of precision, who say that it was common to all ages, and who suppose that the Prophets, equally with the Apostles, were

⁵³Com. Jn. 3:3.

⁵⁴Com. I Cor. 8:4.

ministers of the Gospel.⁵⁵

In "The Argument" section of his commentary on John's Gospel, Calvin stated that "the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον (Gospel) denotes, in Scripture, by way of eminence, (κατ' ἐξοχὴν) the glad and delightful message of the grace exhibited to us in Christ."⁵⁶

Another example of Calvin's utilization of the linguistic factor in elucidating and establishing a basic doctrine of New Testament Christianity is in connection with a study of repentance. In discussing Matthew 27:3, a good statement is found:

He says that Judas repented; not that he reformed, but that the crime which he had committed gave him uneasiness; as God frequently opens the eyes of the reprobate, so as to begin to feel their miseries, and to be alarmed at them. For those who are sincerely grieved so as to reform, are said not only μεταμελεῖν but also μετάνοεῖν , from which is derived also μετάνοια , which is a true conversion of the soul to God. So, then, Judas conceived disgust and horror, not so as to turn to God, but rather that, being overwhelmed with despair, he might serve as an example of a man entirely shut out from the grace of God. Justly, indeed, does Paul say, that the sorrow which leads to repentance is salutary, (II Cor. 7:10) but if a man stumble at the very threshold, he will derive no advantage from a confused and mistaken grief. What is more, this is a just punishment with which God at length visits the wicked, who have obstinately despised his judgment, that he gives them up to Satan to be tormented without the hope of consolation. . . . But if the Papists were right in what they teach in their schools about repentance, we could find

⁵⁵Com. on Synoptics. "The Argument."

⁵⁶Com. Jn. "The Argument."

no defect in that of Judas, to which their definition of repentance fully applies; for we perceive in it contrition of heart, and confession of the mouth, and satisfaction of deed, as they talk. Hence we infer, that they take nothing more than the bark; for they leave out what was the chief point, the conversion of the man to God, when the sinner, broken down by shame and fear, denies himself so as to render obedience to righteousness.⁵⁷

In discussing Luke 15:10, Calvin pointed out that the word "repentance" in this passage is

. . . specially limited to the conversion of those who, having altogether turned aside from God, rise as it were from death to life; for otherwise the exercise of repentance ought to be uninterrupted throughout our whole life, and no man is exempted from this necessity, since every one is reminded by his imperfections that he ought to aim at daily progress.⁵⁸

There are also evidences that Calvin anticipated recent developments in seeking the Semetic substratum of Greek expressions in the New Testament. An example of this is seen in his interpretation of Matthew 5:3:

Many are pressed down by distresses, and yet continue to swell inwardly with pride and cruelty. But Christ pronounces those to be happy who, chastened and subdued by afflictions, submit themselves wholly to God, and, with inward humility, betake themselves to him for protection.

The Semetic substratum which Calvin found here is obviously Psalm 34:2.

⁵⁷Com. Matt. 27:3.

⁵⁸Com. Lk. 15:10.

The Hebrew word **אָנָוִים**, anavim, which we have rendered humble, signifies not all the afflicted in general, but those who, being humbled and subdued by affliction, instead of breathing the spirit of pride, are cast down, and ready to abase themselves to the very dust. These, he says, shall be partakers of his joy : : this joy shall spring from hope, because, having received a pledge of their deliverance, they shall cheerfully have recourse to God. ⁵⁹

In order to understand properly certain verses, Calvin employed the Hebrew background. An example of this is found in Romans 9:15:

The only true cause of salvation is expressed in the two words used by Moses. The first is **חֶנֶן**, [chenen], which means to favour or to show kindness freely and bountifully; the other is **רַחֲמִים** [rechem], which is to be treated with mercy. Thus is confirmed what Paul intended, that the mercy of God, being gratuitous, is under no restraint, but turns wherever it pleases. ⁶⁰

[omit these
translations.
Chanan
racham
Calvin does not
transliterate]

In commenting on I Corinthians 15:45, Calvin utilized the Hebrew in seeking to explain the meaning of the word "soul":

It is well known, that the Hebrew word **נֶפֶשׁ**, (nephesh) which Moses makes use of, is taken in a variety of senses; but in this passage it is taken to mean either vital motion, or the very essence of life itself. The second of these I prefer. I observe that the same thing is affirmed as to beasts--that they were made a living soul, (Gen. 1:20, 24;) but as the soul of every animal must be judged of according to its kind, there is nothing to hinder that a soul, that is to say, vital motion, may be common to all; and yet at the same time the soul of man may have something peculiar and distinguishing, namely, immortal essence, as the light of intelligence and reason. ⁶¹

⁵⁹Com. Ps. 34:2.

⁶⁰Com. Rom. 9:15.

⁶¹Com. I Cor. 15:45.

An example of Calvin's use of the Hebrew to enable him to understand a passage in the New Testament is found in his discussion of Philippians 3:5:

The common opinion is, that the Pharisees were so called from a term signifying separation; but I approve rather of what I learned at one time from Capito, a man of sacred memory, that it was because they boasted that they were endowed with the gift of interpreting Scripture, for פָּרָשׁ , (parash) among the Hebrews, conveys the idea of interpretation. While others declared themselves to be literals, they preferred to be regarded as Pharisees, as being in possession of the interpretations of the ancients.⁶²

Another discussion of this is found in Calvin's comments on Matthew 5:20. Still another example is found in his discussion of Ephesians 4:15: "When he (Paul) bids us give heed to the truth in love, he uses the preposition in (ἐν,) like the corresponding Hebrew preposition בְּ , (beth.) as signifying with, -- speaking the truth WITH love." ⁶³

Examples of the use of Hebrew to help arrive at the meaning of a passage in the New Testament could be multiplied. One more example from the Pauline epistles, Calvin's discussion of II Corinthians 9:5, will be cited:

In place of blessing, some render it collection. I have preferred, however, to render it literally, the Greeks having em-

⁶²Com. Philip. 3:5.

⁶³Com. Eph. 4:15.

played the term εὐλογίας to express the Hebrew word בְּרָכָה (beracah,) which is used in the sense of a blessing, that is, an invoking of prosperity, as well as in the sense of beneficence.⁶⁴

4. Conclusion. Any trustworthy commentator must have such an intimate knowledge of the original languages as enables him to exercise an independent judgment and to estimate the value of the work of his predecessors. Calvin, with study under some of the best European scholars and with an unusual power to retain, undoubtedly attained this competence.

Calvin would not have dared to be so dogmatic, as he frequently is on difficult points where linguistic knowledge is involved, without having the assurance of being in possession of that knowledge which made it safe for him to speak. He did not hesitate to cross swords with Erasmus, who was an outstanding New Testament exegete and pioneer in higher criticism.⁶⁵

There was not, of course, the voluminous amount of literature to consult that is now available, which makes biblical exegesis the domain of specialists. In his time, however, Calvin apparently overlooked no means that were available to get at the truth of the

⁶⁴Com. II Cor. 9:5.

⁶⁵Hunter, The Teaching of Calvin (second edition, revised; London: James Clarke and Co., 1950), pp. 20-21.

Scripture.⁶⁶

The emphasis which was placed on linguistic training in his time, and his own extensive study of biblical languages, unquestionably influenced Calvin's use of the linguistic factor and made him sensitive to the importance of utilizing it in biblical exegesis.

The critical and logical emphasis of Humanism.

1. Calvin's Humanist training. In 1523 Calvin's father sent him to continue his education under Maturin Cordier at the College of La Marche at Paris. Cordier was a Humanist and, like John Colet, was an educational reformer although he was not as yet an adherent of the Reformation. To him Calvin owed the command of an elegant Latin style, which distinguished his writings from those of his fellow Reformers. Here he was also trained in the correct use of the French language.⁶⁷

Later, at the insistence of his father, Calvin took up the study of law. Upon the death of Calvin's father in 1531 the parental pressure that had kept him to the study of law was removed. Within

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 22.

⁶⁷Doumergue, Jean Calvin, les hommes et les choses de son temps, op. cit., p. 66.

a month of his father's death Calvin had returned to Paris and had begun the study of the classics with all of the zeal of an eager disciple of the "new learning."⁶⁸

Being influenced by Guillaume Budé and by Cop, both earnest Humanists, Francis I of France had appointed in March, 1530, a group of "Royal Lecturers" to give instruction in Greek, Hebrew, and mathematics. This was an important event in the history of French education. The "new learning" assumed a new place in France. Calvin eagerly availed himself of this opportunity. He became a part of a congenial and relatively large circle of young Humanists and jurists.⁶⁹

Like all young Humanists, he was greatly influenced by Erasmus. Only Budé, to his mind, could rank with the great Hollander. The significant work of Erasmus had already been done by the time Calvin came to Paris for his humanistic training. Such works as the Praise of Folly, the Adages, and the Colloquies must have been read by Calvin. Calvin knew well his critical editions of the classics. In his Commentary on Seneca's Treatise on Clemency Calvin stated that "Erasmus is the chief ornament of letters, none having greater

⁶⁸Williston Walker, John Calvin (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1906), p. 53.

⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 54-55.

charm."⁷⁰

Despite the fact that Calvin did not praise Erasmus after his conversion as he had done prior to his conversion, he cited Erasmus no less than 150 times as a critical or exegetical authority.⁷¹

Perhaps the best evidence of Calvin's Humanist training is his Commentary on Seneca's Treatise on Clemency. This work reveals a range of reading that was most unusual for a man who was not yet twenty-three; for it was published in 1532. The text embraces citations from fifty-six Latin and twenty-two Greek classical writers, seven church fathers, and most of the Humanists of his own age.⁷²

Certainly this shows something of the scope of his training and Humanist interest. As M'Crie⁷³ points out, the first work of an author is the place where we discover the early bent of his mind and the germ of those talents which will be developed in subsequent writings.

In this first work Calvin gave much attention to the peculiarities of the Stoic philosophy. Especially noticeable is the fact that he made

⁷⁰CO, V, 35.

⁷¹CO, LIX, 76.

⁷²CO, V, 1-162.

⁷³Thomas M'Crie, The Early Years of John Calvin (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1880), p. 20.

so many references to the writings of Cicero. M'Crie⁷⁴ states that it was Calvin's practice, till a late period of his life, to read regularly the whole of Cicero's works every year.

The extent of Calvin's Humanist interest can also be seen by the number of references to classical authors in the Commentaries and Institutes. For the purposes of this study it will not be necessary to make a detailed analysis of these references. A compilation of classical authors quoted in the Institutes has been made by Nixon.⁷⁵

2. Calvin's Humanist characteristics.

(1) Calvin's "mental set." Calvin was converted to radical Protestantism rather late in life. He had been almost entirely devoted to the humanistic ideal until he was twenty-four. Most young people make definite religious commitments before they are eighteen. Calvin, however, did not experience conversion until he had reached his twenty-fourth year, and for a precocious person that is a relatively late date. By the time he was twenty-four, he was a seasoned Humanist, as we have already noted in describing his study of the com-

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 21.

⁷⁵Leroy Nixon, Complete Indexes to the Institutes of the Christian Religion (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), pp. 21-25.

mentaries of Seneca. As a result of this relatively late conversion he had developed a Humanist "mental set." Having so thoroughly imbibed the spirit of humanism, Calvin's conversion would not eradicate his acquired habits and attitudes of mind.⁷⁶

It is true that Calvin's "sudden conversion" changed his relation to Humanism. The classics yielded to the Scriptures. But Calvin did not repent of Humanism; he only graduated from it.⁷⁷ Calvin's devotion to biblical theology never quenched his Humanism. Breen⁷⁸ refers to the "precipitate" of Humanism in Calvin's later work. It might even be called a ferment; for it was something active and activating.

(2) Evidences of Humanist characteristics. His attitude toward tradition and the medieval doctors was undoubtedly influenced by his Humanist "mental set." Like other men who had undergone the influence of the humanistic spirit, Calvin reacted sharply against much of the medieval tradition.⁷⁹

⁷⁶Breen, op. cit., p. 146.

⁷⁷McNeill, op. cit., p. 218.

⁷⁸Breen, op. cit., p. 147.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 146-47.

Calvin's zeal for restoring the true text of Scripture, even when it meant opposing some of the conservative opinion of the age, is another characteristic of Humanism. He gave approval to the critical apparatus of Valla, Erasmus, and Bude, as has been shown in a previous section of this study. Although he often challenged their conclusions, he did approve their method.⁸⁰

Much of Calvin's lucidity, elegance, and sophistication, as far as style is concerned, can be traced to his Humanist background.

A characteristic of Humanism was an emphasis on clearness and good taste. Calvin's proficiency in classical learning surely helped in the purity of his style. His use of illustrations also reflected his acquaintanceship with classical authors. McNeill⁸¹ affirms that he absorbed much of his style from Cicero.

The close attention which Calvin gave to words is another evidence of the influence of Humanism. The Humanists had been mainly philologists, who had cultivated words. Calvin made much of words, and to his mind a word had great dignity. Calvin was a master of words.⁸²

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 154.

⁸¹McNeill, Books of Faith and Power (first edition; New York: Harper and Bros., 1947), p. 56.

⁸²Breen, op. cit., p. 157.

Calvin's tendency to be objective and logical in his interpretation of Scripture can also be said to be an evidence of his Humanist background. Although, like Luther, Calvin started from faith, he examined each book more carefully and in a more objective way than did Luther.⁸³

For the purposes of this study, detailed illustration of these characteristics is not necessary. Some illustrations relevant to this aspect of the study were given when consideration was given to the development of textual criticism and linguistic training. Others will be given when Calvin's reaction to allegory is examined.

3. Relation of Calvin's Humanist training to the linguistic principle of exegesis. Calvin lived from two centers, one intellectual and the other essentially religious. Dowey⁸⁴ has affirmed that Calvin the theologian and Calvin the Humanist scholar stood side by side. The Humanist aspect of his training had a decided influence on his use of the linguistic principle of exegesis. Such aspects of the linguistic principle as emphasis on the one literal meaning, the text, importance of words, logical relations, and context were especially influenced by

⁸³Com. Heb. "The Argument"; Com. James. "The Argument."

⁸⁴Edward A. Dowey, Jr., The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 103.

his Humanist background. Surely Calvin's Humanist and classical studies helped to make him an instrument for the restoring of the linguistic principle to its proper place in biblical hermeneutics. In any study of the factors which influenced John Calvin's biblical exegesis, this factor must not be omitted.

III. EXCESSIVE USE OF ALLEGORY BY SOME PATRISTIC AND MEDIEVAL EXEGETES

Use of allegory by Patristic and medieval exegetes. "Alle-

gory" has been described as a system whereby the interpreter can first put any given ideas into Scripture and then, with an air of authority, take them out of Scripture. Philo was one of the early and prominent allegorists. He transformed Moses into a Sinaitic Plato. The Gnostics found much of their system in the parables of Jesus. Many of the Fathers used allegory.⁸⁵

Even Augustine often ran into excessive allegorizing. He allowed four different kinds of interpretation including the historical, aetiological, the analogical, and the allegorical. Some expositions are good because his own rich experiences and profound acquaintance

⁸⁵H. S. Nash, History of the Higher Criticism (New York: 1900), pp. 31-32.

with the operations of the human heart enabled him to comment with surpassing beauty. His exegetical treatises, however, are probably the least valuable of his multifarious writings.⁸⁶

In this cursory sketch of the excessive use of allegory, little attention will be given to the Patristic period. Not all of the Patristic exegetes were allegorists, but it can certainly be said that allegory was more widely accepted than the grammatico-historical method.

The use of allegory was widespread during the Middle Ages. It was no longer used, however, with the originality and ecclesiastically dangerous freedom that marked some passages from the writings of Origen and Ambrose. Ecclesiastical tradition tended to regulate its use. The dogmas of the church, received upon authority, kept chaos from breaking out in the field of Bible study. Tradition was now enshrined mainly in the writings of the Fathers. Through the period of Gregory the Great and the Venerable Bede some measure of originality and independence remained. Thereafter for six or seven centuries the dominant type of biblical interpretation rested upon direct or indirect quotation of the Patristic literature and was somewhat repetitious. From time to time, however, freedom and

⁸⁶Milton S. Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics (New York: Easton and Mains, 1890), p. 44.

originality broke out.⁸⁷

Gregory the Great emphasized the spiritual as opposed to the literal in exegesis. In expounding the Song of Songs, Gregory stated that "allegory makes a kind of machine for the soul far off from God by which it may be raised up to him."⁸⁸ In the Preface to the Moralia, his lectures on the book of Job, Gregory gives us his conception of the authorship of Scripture. Gregory refused to become involved in an investigation of the human authorship of the book of Job; since it is the work, not of man, but of the Holy Spirit: "But who was the writer, it is utterly useless to ask; since at any rate the Holy Spirit is trustworthily believed to have been the Author of the book."⁸⁹ Arcturus, Orion, the Pleiades, and the chambers of the south in Job 9:9 represent respectively the church, the martyrs, the doctors, and the Holy Spirit. More than anything else Gregory was concerned for the reader's ethical and spiritual enrichment and the building up of his orthodox faith.

⁸⁷McNeill, "History of the Interpretation of the Bible: Medieval and Reformation Period," The Interpreter's Bible (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952), I, 116.

⁸⁸"Exposition of the Song of Songs," Prologue, 2, Jacques P. Migne, Patrologia Latina (Petit Montrouge, Latin series, 221 vols., 1844-65), LXXXIX, 473.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 517.

Alcuin made an effort to confine himself to the Patristic literature as authoritative. Originality was to be confined to selection. Rabanus Maurus, Alcuin's most distinguished pupil, favored spiritual interpretations. Thus the four wheels of Ezekiel's chariot are the Law, the Prophets, the Gospels, and the apostles.⁹⁰ Rabanus also believed in the four senses of Scripture. In the Preface to his book Allegories on Holy Scripture he explains that these are four daughters of one mother, Wisdom. The historical interpretation is milk, the allegorical is bread, the anagogical is savory nourishment, and the tropological is exhilarating wine. "In the house of our soul history lays the foundation, allegory erects the walls, analogy sets on the roof, and tropology provides the ornaments."⁹¹

An extreme example of allegory is found in Bernard's sermons on the Song of Songs. These are mostly edification and contain little history. His allegorical enthusiasm carried him far beyond the embarrassing literal sense of the book. The words "the virgins love thee" sent him off to elaborate the diverse reasons why God is loved by angels, archangels, virtues, powers, principalities, dominations,

⁹⁰Migne, Patrologia Latina, CX, 525 ff.

⁹¹Ibid., CXII, 849.

cherubim, and seraphim.⁹² Bernard interpreted the two swords of Luke 22:38 to mean the spiritual sword and the material sword which are to be wielded by the church and by the soldier at the bidding of the clergy and at the command of the emperor.⁹³ Many other passages were employed to give scriptural basis to the papal claims.

The significant commentator Peter Comestor (d. about 1179) was the chief author of the Historia Scholastica. Comestor at the very outset says: "Holy Scripture is God's dining room, where the guests are made soberly drunk."⁹⁴

Thomas Aquinas was not only a significant philosophical theologian, but also a scholar who was thoroughly acquainted with the Bible. In the Summa Theologica Aquinas gave his doctrine of sacred Scripture:

The author of Holy Writ is God, in whose power it is to signify His meaning, not by words only (as man also can do), but also by things themselves. So, whereas in every other science things are signified by words, this science has the property, that the things signified by the words have themselves also a signification. Therefore that first signification whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal. That signification whereby things signified by words have themselves

⁹²"Sermons on the Canticles," XVI, 1; XXXIV, 3, 5; XXXV, 2, Migne, op. cit., CLXXXIII, 849, 959 ff.

⁹³"De Consideratione," IV, 3, 7, Migne, op. cit., CLXXXII, 776.

⁹⁴Migne, Patrologia Latina, CXCVIII, 1053.

also a signification is called the spiritual sense⁹⁵

Aquinas did have some awareness of the literal sense, however, as seen in his statement in the Summa where he quotes with approval Augustine's statement: ". . . for all the senses are founded on one-- the literal--from which alone can any argument be drawn" ⁹⁶ In his worth-while book on hermeneutics, The Bible in the Church, Robert Grant⁹⁷ emphasizes that Aquinas gave more attention to the literal sense than is generally assumed. However, in his Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected Out of the Works of the Fathers Aquinas shows preference for highly allegorical or nonliteral interpretations. He prefers an interpretation such as the one which maintains that the locusts and wild honey that nourished John the Baptist (Matt. 3:4) point to the fact that his speeches were sweet as honey but of short flight, like that of locusts; and his camel's hair garment represents the church of the Gentiles. Another preference is the interpretation which suggests that the four thousand of Mark 8:9, 20 are men perfect in the four virtues; the five thousand of Mark 8:19 are men en-

⁹⁵Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd., 1920), Part I, question 1, article 10.

⁹⁶Loc. cit.

⁹⁷Robert M. Grant, The Bible in the Church (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1948), p. 104.

slaved to the five senses.⁹⁸ The teaching of the church, however, is to be adhered to "as an infallible and divine rule," affirmed Aquinas.⁹⁹

After this brief survey it is possible to understand the statement of Fullerton:

. . . in the Middle Ages all sense for antiquity, for origins, for sources, was lost. Even the original languages in which the Bible was written were largely forgotten, and it was chiefly known in the corrupted texts of the Vulgate. The allegorical method of interpretation with its four-fold sense was supreme. The Song of Songs was the favorite book of the Canon. Theoretically, indeed, the Bible was still the final authority, but practically, it became submerged under the ecclesiastical tradition which rolled on through these ages in an ever increasing volume. The Bible was a book which the Church alone could interpret and understand.¹⁰⁰

Reaction against allegory and emphasis on the literal method of exegesis. During the fourth century the School of Antioch, under the leadership of Diodorus of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and John Chrysostom, placed a strong emphasis upon the historico-literal method of exegesis. This group of men had a strong influence on the

⁹⁸Aquinas, Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected Out of the Works of the Fathers (Oxford: James Parker and Co., 1870), I, 95-96; II, 150.

⁹⁹Aelred Whitacre, et al., St. Thomas Aquinas (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1924), pp. 125, 139.

¹⁰⁰Kemper Fullerton, Reformation Principles and Modern Preaching (Cincinnati: 1900), p. 4.

Reformation.¹⁰¹ As has been suggested, there were other men in the Patristic period who also reacted against allegory.

In the ninth century John Scotus Erigena emphasized the need of a sound, intellectual understanding of the text. He examined textual variants, seeking a fuller understanding of the Scriptures.¹⁰²

Beryl Smalley¹⁰³ points out that Hugh and Andrew of St. Victor and other Christian scholars in the twelfth century profited by the Old Testament scholarship of Solomon Rashi and the French rabbis who followed him. The contribution of Hugh was in the fact that he placed more stress on the literal interpretation. However, he was no mere literalist. He also used the allegorical and tropological as well as the literal sense.¹⁰⁴ Richard and Andrew also tended to put more emphasis on the historical approach.

As has already been indicated, resistance to allegorical excess apparently owed much to Rashi and his Christian disciples. Fol-

¹⁰¹Grant, op. cit., p. 84.

¹⁰²H. H. Glunz, History of the Vulgate in England from Alcuin to Roger Bacon (Cambridge: University Press, 1933), p. 108 ff.

¹⁰³Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941).

¹⁰⁴ibid., p. 77.

lowing in this tradition was Nicholas of Lyra (d. 1340). His commentary Postillae Perpetuae in Vetus et Novum Testamentum reflected the opinions of Rashi in many places. Although he recognized the traditional description of the four senses, he worked hard to bring out the historical meaning of the Hebrew and Greek.¹⁰⁵ It is interesting to note that the Waldenses, who had emphasized the literal meaning of the Scriptures for many years, made considerable use of the writings of Nicholas of Lyra.¹⁰⁶ Luther also used the Postillae with appreciation.

In addition to Nicholas of Lyra, there were a number of other scholars who paved the way for the Reformation emphasis on the literal and historical method in exegesis. These included Lorenzo Valla, John Wessel Gansfort, John Colet, Jacques Lefèvre, Erasmus, and other Humanists.¹⁰⁷ Most of these men lived in the latter half of the fifteenth century and in the early part of the sixteenth century.

¹⁰⁵"Nicolas de Lyra and Rashi: The Minor Prophets," Rashi Anniversary Volume (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1941), pp. 115-47.

¹⁰⁶Louis I. Newman, Jewish Influence on Christian Reform Movements (New York: Columbia University Press, 1925), pp. 74-78, 213-39.

¹⁰⁷McNeill, "History of the Interpretation of the Bible: Medieval and Reformation Period," The Interpreter's Bible, op. cit., I, 123.

Calvin's reaction to the excesses of the allegorical method was a reaction that had been experienced by many who went before him. Luther often pointed out that he preferred the grammatico-historical method, but he was not always content to follow it. Too often he utilized the stock allegories of the Fathers or invented his own. But he realized that he was wrong in so doing and admonished himself and others. "And I admonish you with the utmost earnestness, seek to be diligent in appraising historical matters."¹⁰⁸

Calvin's reaction against allegory and emphasis on the literal method of exegesis. Although there had been some non-allegorical approach to exegesis among the early Reformers, one must go back a thousand years to the best work of the School of Antioch to find so complete a rejection of allegory as is furnished by Calvin. Allegorical interpretations which had been put forth in the Patristic period and endorsed by illustrious expositors in all the subsequent centuries, like the interpretation of Noah's ark and the seamless garment of Christ, were cast aside as rubbish by Calvin.¹⁰⁹ Although Calvin had to use the literal method as a countermeasure against the assertions of the

¹⁰⁸M. Luther, Werke (Böhlav; Weimar edition, 1883---, 63 vols.), XLII. 377.

¹⁰⁹Gilbert, op. cit., p. 209.

Roman Church, he did not use it as a polemical weapon as much as did Luther. Calvin was more interested in the literal method as a scientific method by which he could probe the mind of the writer.¹¹⁰

Others had emphasized the literal sense, but most of them still retained the allegorical, tropological, and anagogical senses. Calvin adopted the literal and historical senses and excluded the other three senses. It is noteworthy that the book which brought the greatest delight to the medieval allegorists was the Song of Songs. Calvin did not write a commentary on this book and almost completely neglected it. This shows something of his reaction to allegory. It is not surprising that a modern writer would make the following statement:

If in the modern church this old method of interpretation (allegory) is largely discredited, although often surreptitiously used even among intelligent Protestants, we probably owe that fact more to John Calvin than to any other man. Calvin, in a word, was a stern and exact literalist. He hated the vague and insecure renderings of Scripture which allegory made possible. When he appealed from the Pope to the Bible for his authority, he had to know with steady certainty what the Bible meant to say.¹¹¹

Fosdick continues by asserting that "Calvin believed that every passage in Scripture had but one original and true sense, which allegory

¹¹⁰Fullerton, Prophecy and Authority (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1919), pp. 135-36.

¹¹¹Harry Emerson Fosdick, The Modern Use of the Bible (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1924), p. 83.

only travestied, and that one sense he passionately desired to know."¹¹²

Calvin reacted violently against allegory, which was so often carried to an extreme and which so often turned the Scriptures into a "conjurer's hat out of which anything might be brought, the more surprising, the better."¹¹³ Since many of the Roman "sophists" utilized allegory, Calvin was led to say some rather shocking things:

And even if there were in the papacy a doctrine not bad and fully false of itself, it would nonetheless be necessary to detest such a style as they have invented, because by this means they have perverted the true and natural use of the word of God.¹¹⁴

Illustrations of Calvin's reaction against allegory and his devotion to the thesis that the Bible has one literal meaning are numerous. A few representative examples will be cited.

At times Calvin's scorn of allegory flamed out in heated words. In commenting on Genesis 18:2, "And he lifted up his eyes and looked, and lo, three men stood by him; and . . . (he) bowed himself toward the ground," he pours out his scorn as follows:

¹¹²Ibid., p. 84.

¹¹³Hunter, The Teaching of Calvin, op. cit., p. 27.

¹¹⁴Sermon on Job 12:2 (CO, XXXIII, 709), cited by Doumergue, Jean Calvin, les hommes et les choses de son temps (1910), IV, 22.

The mystery which some of the ancient writers have endeavoured to elicit from this act; namely, that Abraham adored one out of the three; whom he saw, and, therefore, perceived by faith, that there are three persons in one God, since it is frivolous, and obnoxious to ridicule and calumny, I am more than content to omit. 115

Even texts whose allegorical meanings have been almost universally accepted, were taken as literal by Calvin. An example of this is found in his comments on Genesis 3:15, "... it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." The statement is rather long but is well worth quoting.

This passage affords too clear a proof of the great ignorance, dulness, and carelessness, which have prevailed among all the learned men of the Papacy. The feminine gender has crept in instead of the masculine or neuter. There has been no one among them who would consult the Hebrew or Greek Codices, or who would even compare the Latin copies with each other. Therefore, by a common error, this most corrupt reading has been received. Then, a profane exposition of it has been invented, by applying to the mother of Christ what is said concerning her seed. There is, indeed, no ambiguity in the words here used by Moses; but I do not agree with others respecting their meaning; for other interpreters take the seed for Christ, without controversy; as if it were said, that some one would arise from the seed of the woman who should wound the serpent's head. Gladly would I give my suffrage in support of their opinion, but that I regard the word seed as too violently distorted by them; for who will concede that a collective noun is to be understood of one man only? Further, as the perpetuity of the contest is noted, so victory is promised to the human race through a continual succession of ages. I explain, therefore, the seed to mean the posterity of the woman

generally.¹¹⁶

Certain traditional proof-texts had been selected by the Fathers out of the New Testament to support their allegorizing. These include I Corinthians 9:9; 10:1-13; and Galatians 4:21-26. Calvin rejected the inferences which the Fathers made from these texts. In discussing I Corinthians 9:9, which refers to the muzzling of the ox which treads out the corn, Calvin affirmed:

Nor is it as if he meant to expound that precept allegorically, as some hair-brained spirits take occasion from this to turn everything into allegories. Thus they turn dogs into men, trees into angels, and turn all scripture into a laughing-stock.¹¹⁷

A further statement on the Scripture's use of allegory is found in the Institutes: "Allegories ought to be carried no further than Scripture expressly sanctions; so far are they from forming a sufficient basis to found doctrines upon."¹¹⁸

Calvin affirmed over and over again that he did not want to tamper with allegory as Origen and others had done. In fact, he pointed out that allegory is "undoubtedly a contrivance of Satan to undermine the authority of Scripture. . . . The true meaning of Scrip-

¹¹⁶Com. Gen. 3:15.

¹¹⁷Com. I Cor. 9:9.

¹¹⁸II, v, 19.

ture is the natural and obvious meaning."¹¹⁹ To explain Paul's use of the word "allegory" in Galatians 4:24, Calvin quoted Chrysostom to show that "allegory" is here used in an improper sense (κατάχρησις --catachresis) and that Moses meant the history only in a literal sense.¹²⁰ In his Dedication to Grynaeus in his commentary on Romans, Calvin further stated that "it is therefore an audacity, closely allied to a sacrilege, rashly to turn Scripture in any way we please, and to indulge our fancies as in sport; which has been done by many in former times."¹²¹ In discussing John 1:16, Calvin agreed that Augustine's comment was "piously and judiciously said, but has nothing to do with the present passage."¹²² Again in discussing Ephesians 3:18, Calvin pointed out that

Augustine is quite delighted with his own acuteness, which throws no light on the subject. Endeavouring to discover some kind of mysterious allusion to the figure of the cross, he makes the breadth to be love, --the height, hope, --the length, patience, --and the depth, humility. This is very ingenious and entertaining: but what has it to do with Paul's meaning? Not more, certainly, than the opinion of Ambrose, that the allusion is to the figure of a sphere. Laying aside the views of others, I shall

¹¹⁹Com. Gal. 4:24.

¹²⁰Loc. cit.

¹²¹Com. Rom. "The Epistle Dedicatory."

¹²²Com. Jn. 1:16.

state what will be universally acknowledged to be the simple and true meaning.¹²³

Calvin's reaction to allegory was so extreme in some cases that some have accused him of reading biblical poetry as prose.¹²⁴ It was natural, in the recoil from the unprofitableness of allegory, to tend toward an extreme position in regard to the literal sense of the Scripture. There are some who affirm that this insistence on the literal sense is a weakness in the exegetical work of Calvin. Gilbert insists that it is a weakness to take the stories of the early chapters of Genesis as pure history. Satan entered into the serpent that tempted Eve and caused it to speak a human language. Lions, wolves, and tigers meekly entered Noah's ark with lambs. This extreme insistence on the letter, for Gilbert, makes some of Calvin's expositions as worthless as though he had been of the school of Origen.¹²⁵

Without conceding that Gilbert's criticism is justified, it must be said that Calvin's extreme position in regard to the renunciation of allegory disturbed many of his contemporaries. Farrar¹²⁶

¹²³Com. Eph. 3:18.

¹²⁴Gilbert, op. cit., pp. 209-10.

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 210.

¹²⁶Farrar, op. cit., p. 346.

points out that one has said that Calvin expounded oracles about the Trinity or the Messiah like a Jew or a Socinian. Hunnius, a Protestant, said that Calvin had corrupted Scripture in a detestable manner and that he ought to have been burned. Not to be outdone, the Roman Catholics called Calvin a Mohammedan.

Some of this opposition came because Calvin would not use time-honored texts to prove articles of faith. For example, Calvin refused to regard John 8:46 as a proof-text for Christ's sinlessness or complete innocence.

"Which of you convicteth me of sin?" Yet those who think that Christ here asserts his complete innocence, because he alone surpassed all men, so far as he was the Son of God, are mistaken. For this defence must be restricted to what belongs to the passage, as if he had asserted that nothing could be brought forward to show that he was not a faithful servant of God. . . . The only object which he has in view is to give authority to his ministry, as appears more clearly from what follows. 127

Another example of Calvin's exegetical literalness is found in his comments on John 10:30.

"I and my Father are one." The ancients made a wrong use of this passage to prove that Christ is (ὁμοούσιος) of the same essence with the Father. For Christ does not argue about the unity of substance, but about the agreement which he has with the Father, so that whatsoever is done by Christ will be confirmed by the power of his Father. 128

127 Com. Jn. 8:46.

128 Com. Jn. 10:30.

Calvin also objected to the traditional interpretation that would identify the four chariots of Zechariah 6:1-3 with the Four Gospels.

But as the vision is obscure, interpreters have given it different meanings. They who think that the four Gospels are designated by the four chariots, give a very frigid view. I have elsewhere reminded you, that we are to avoid these futile refinements which of themselves vanish away. Allegories, I know, delight many; but we ought reverently and soberly to interpret the prophetic writings, and not to fly in the clouds, but ever to fix our foot on solid ground. ¹²⁹

Calvin likewise refused to use Isaiah's trisagion in Isaiah 6:3 as an argument to quell the Arians.

The ancients quoted this passage when they wished to prove that there are three persons in one essence of the Godhead. I do not disagree with their opinion; but if I had to contend with heretics, I would rather choose to employ stronger proofs; for they become more obstinate, and assume an air of triumph, when inconclusive arguments are brought against them. . . . And, indeed, this repetition rather points out unwearied perseverance, as if the Prophet had said, that the angels never cease from their melody in singing the praises of God, as the holiness of God supplies us with inexhaustible reasons for them. ¹³⁰

Such standard references as Genesis 1:1; Psalm 18:2; and 23:6 are not accepted by Calvin as legitimate proof-texts for the doctrine of the Trinity. This is seen by his comments on Genesis 1:1:

Moses has it Elohim, a noun of the plural number. Whence the inference is drawn, that the three persons of the Godhead

¹²⁹Com. Zech. 6:1.

¹³⁰Com. Isa. 6:3.

are here noted; but since, as a proof of so great matter, it appears to me to have little solidity, I will not insist upon the word; but rather caution readers to beware of violent glosses of this kind. They think that they have testimony against the Arians to prove the Deity of the Son and of the Spirit, but in the meantime they involve themselves in the error of Sabellius; because Moses afterwards subjoins that the Elohim had spoken, and that the Spirit of Elohim rested upon the waters. If we suppose three persons to be here denoted, there will be no distinction between them. For it will follow, both that the Son is begotten by himself, and that the Spirit is not of the Father, but of himself. For me it is sufficient that the plural number expresses those powers which God exercised in creating the world. . . . But those absurdities, to which I have alluded, forbid us with subtlety to distort what Moses simply declares concerning God himself, by applying it to the separate Persons of the Godhead. ¹³¹

In contrast with those who believe that Calvin reacted too far and became too literal are those who affirm that Calvin was often in danger of letting allegory in by the back door of typology. ¹³² It is true that Calvin used typology to mark the relationship between the Old Covenant and the New; for instance, in making the land of Canaan a figure of the eternal inheritance. ¹³³ Schaff contended that Calvin made an excessive use of typology, especially in his Sermons, and saw not only in David but in every king of Jerusalem a "figure of

¹³¹Com. Gen. 1:1.

¹³²Fullerton, op. cit., pp. 134-35.

¹³³II, II, 1-4.

Christ."¹³⁴ On the other hand, George Adam Smith affirmed that Calvin is very judicious in his use of types.

He examines every alleged type and prediction: . . . And therefore, when he does admit a type or prophecy of Christ, he makes us sure of it. We know that he seeks to learn what God means rather than to find what his own ingenuity can prove. He is jealous to serve his Lord with truth.¹³⁵

It must also be remembered that even in commenting on I Corinthians 10:1-13, which is a passage which involves typology, Calvin protested against the allegorizing of the Old Testament reference as if it were not also to be construed as literal history. Calvin did believe in the messianic prophecies, but he first perceived that they had a primary bearing and practical application to their own times and an ulterior fulfillment in Christ, thus serving a present as well as a future use. He thus explained Psalms 2, 8, 16, 22, 40, 45, 68, and 110 as typically and indirectly messianic. A more complete consideration of the question of accommodation will be given in the section devoted to the study of the problem of religious authority.

Apart from this discovery of "types" of the gospel in the rites and narratives of the Old Testament, Calvin was firm in his

¹³⁴Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), VII, 534.

¹³⁵George Adam Smith, op. cit., p. 146.

avoidance of non-literal meanings.

Undoubtedly it was difficult for Calvin's subtle mind to overcome the temptation to follow the example of so many prominent exegetes and churchmen and give his imagination free play in disregard of the context and the literal meaning of the original. Sometimes he mentioned these suppositions with a regretful tone. An example of this is seen in his discussion of John 9:7.

But some inquire what is meant by the clay composed of dust and spittle, and they explain it to have been a figure of Christ, because the dust denotes the earthly nature of the flesh, and the spittle, which came from his mouth, denotes the Divine essence of the Word. For my part, I lay aside this allegory as being more ingenious than solid, and am satisfied with this simple view, that as man was at first made of clay, so in restoring the eyes Christ made use of clay, showing that he had the same power over a part of the body which the Father had displayed in forming the whole man. Or, perhaps, he intended to declare, by this sign, that it was not more difficult for him to remove the obstruction, and to open the eyes of the blind man, than to wash away clay from any man whatever; and, on the other hand, that it was as much in his power to restore sight to the man as it was to anoint his eyes with clay. I prefer the latter interpretation. ¹³⁶

Regardless of the disagreement as to the extent of Calvin's literal emphasis, it can be said that Calvin's emphasis on the "one literal meaning" was conditioned by his reaction to the excessive allegory of Patristic and medieval exegetes. The linguistic principle of exegesis, of which attention to the literal meaning is a part, was of

¹³⁶Com. Jn. 9:7.

primary importance to John Calvin.

97	118
<u>61</u>	<u>97</u>
36	21

CHAPTER IV

FACTORS INFLUENCING CALVIN'S USE OF THE HISTORICAL PRINCIPLE

I. INTRODUCTION

In Chapter II the historical principle of biblical exegesis was defined as that principle which involves a consideration of the historical setting and background of the biblical books, chronology, and the historical differences and relationships between the Old Testament and the New Testament. It was further shown that John Calvin recognized the existence of the historical principle of exegesis as thus defined.

In this chapter some possible factors influencing Calvin's use of this historical principle will be considered. The three factors suggested and their influence on Calvin's use of the historical principle of biblical exegesis are all considered under the general heading of religious authority.

II. THE PROBLEM OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

General statement of approach. Calvin was faced with the problem of the Roman Catholic emphasis on the importance of tradi-

tion, the Apocrypha of the Old Testament and church dogma, the emphasis of the radical sects on private revelations, and the humanism and rationalism of the heretics. Calvin realized that if the Protestant Reformation were to succeed, it would be necessary to confront and solve the problem of the final authority in the realm of religion. There is evidence that suggests that Calvin's constant involvement in these controversies conditioned his use of the historical principle of biblical exegesis.

In combating the Roman Catholic utilization of the Apocrypha and tradition, Calvin was compelled to give consideration to the canon, the historical background and setting of the biblical books, and chronology in a way which perhaps otherwise would have been neglected. Although the traditional canon was accepted by Calvin, primarily on the basis of the inner witness of the Spirit, he did find it necessary to give some attention to the historical background and validity of the individual books of the Bible. In view of his controversies with the Roman Church, it became even more urgent for him to seek to establish the fact that chronologically and historically Scripture was prior to the church and was the foundation of the church.

In combating the Romanists, rationalists, and radical sects, Calvin attempted to establish the historical inerrancy, infallibility, and finality of the contents of the sixty-six books of the Bible. In

seeking to achieve this purpose, Calvin explained the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament and the many seeming inaccuracies and discrepancies in the Bible by the principles of accommodation and progressive revelation. It has been suggested that the problem of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament was a part of the historical principle of biblical exegesis.]

In the latter part of this chapter consideration will be given to the evidence for the assertion that the controversies with the Roman Catholics, radical sects, and heretics caused Calvin to adopt a legalistic approach and proof-text method in his biblical exegesis. There is evidence that these controversies caused Calvin to depart from time to time, to a greater or lesser degree, from his generally utilized and often avowed historico-grammatical principle. In the heat of controversy and because of the exigencies of the times, there was great pressure on Calvin to forsake the essential aspects of the historical principle of biblical exegesis.

The problem presented by the Roman Catholic emphasis on the Apocrypha of the Old Testament and tradition.

1. Problem of religious authority presented by the Roman Catholic Church. An official statement of the Roman Catholic princi-

ple of religious authority was made by the Council of Trent. The Council of Trent, whose avowed purpose was to heal the divisions of Western Christendom, convened on December 13, 1545. It adjourned, convened again, and finally closed on December 4, 1563, a few months before Calvin's death.¹

In the fourth session, which was held in 1546, the Council of Trent settled the burning question of the rule of faith in favor of the existing Roman system and against the views of the Reformers. Pauck² points out that in establishing this "tradition," the fathers of Trent affirmed as normative that part of ancient and medieval Christianity which could be read in the light of the teachings of Thomas Aquinas. The council worded its decrees with great caution and circumspection; but it decidedly condemned the Protestant doctrine of the supremacy of the Bible.

In his Acts of the Council of Trent: with the Antidote Calvin stated the decrees in the words of the council before refuting them.

In order to understand the problem of religious authority presented by the Roman Church, it will be helpful to give the decrees which relate

¹Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), VII, 60.

²Wilhelm Pauck, The Heritage of the Reformation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), p. 183.

to religious authority. The first decree of the fourth session of the Council of Trent, which was held on April 8, 1546, is the decree concerning the canonical Scriptures.

The Holy, Ecumenical, and General Council of Trent, lawfully met in the Holy Spirit, under the presidency of the foresaid three Legates of the Apostolic See, keeping it constantly in view that by the removal of error the full purity of the Gospel may be preserved in the Church . . . following the example of orthodox Fathers, the Council with like pious affection and reverence receives and venerates all the Books both of the Old and New Testaments, seeing that one God is the author of both--and likewise also the traditions pertaining both to faith and manners, as dictated either by the lips of Christ or by the Holy Spirit and preserved by uninterrupted succession in the Catholic Church. It has been thought proper to subjoin a list of the Sacred Books to this decree, that no doubt may arise as to what the Books are which the Council receives.³

The decree then named the traditional books of the Bible plus the books known as the Apocrypha of the Old Testament. The remainder of the first decree is quite controversial.

Whosoever shall not receive these entire Books, with all their parts, as they are accustomed to be read in the Catholic Church, and are contained in the old Vulgate Latin edition, as sacred and canonical, and shall knowingly and intentionally despise foresaid traditions, let him be anathema. Wherefore, let all understand the way and order in which the Council, after laying the foundation of a Confession of Faith is to proceed, and what testimonies and supports it will chiefly employ in confirming doctrines and renewing discipline in the Church.⁴

³Calvin's Tracts, III, 64. Also cf. Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom (New York: Harper and Bros., 1877), 79-82.

⁴Calvin's Tracts, III, 65.

Portions of the second decree of the fourth session are also relevant to the problem at hand.

Besides, in order to curb petulant minds, the Council decrees that no man trusting to his own wisdom, in matters of faith and discipline pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, twisting the Sacred Scripture to his own sense, dare to interpret the Holy Scripture contrary to that sense which the holy mother Church, to whom it belongs to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, has held and holds, or even contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers, even though these interpretations are never to be published. Let those who contravene be denounced by the ordinaries, and punished with the pains appointed by law. . . . Moreover, wishing to repress the temerity by which the words of Holy Scripture are turned and twisted to all kinds of profanity--to buffoonery, fable, vanity, adulation, detraction, impious superstitions, diabolical charms, divinations, casting of lots, and also slanderous libels, the Council commands and ordains, in order to put an end to such irreverence and contempt, and prevent any one from daring, in future, in any way to use the words of Scripture for these and similar purposes, that all persons of this description, all corrupters and violators of the Word of God, shall be coerced by their bishops by legal and discretionary punishment.⁵

The foregoing decrees are the most important decrees relating to the problem of religious authority. Acting through its hierarchical leaders, the Roman Catholic community crystallized their doctrine of authority into definite form.

2. Evidence that Calvin was greatly concerned with the teaching on religious authority presented by the Roman Catholic Church.

⁵Ibid., pp. 66-67.

Calvin was one of the first to write against these decisions of the Council of Trent on authority. He granted that a council might be of great helpfulness, provided it was truly ecumenical, impartial, and free. But Calvin denied that the Council of Trent had these necessary characteristics. The evangelical groups and the Greek Church were not represented at all. It was a Roman council under the control of the Pope. The members, only about forty, were mostly Italians who were not distinguished for learning, but were churchmen "garrulous and audacious . . . some of whom hunt after mitres, and others after cardinals' hats, while all of them sell their prattle to the Roman Pontiff."⁶ They merely agreed to the wish of the Vatican and then issued the decrees as responses of the Holy Spirit.

The notary reads over what no one dares to disapprove, and the asses shake their ears in assent. Behold the oracle which imposes religious obligations on the whole world! . . . The proclamation of the Council is entitled to no more weight than the cry of an auctioneer.⁷

Calvin carefully analysed and dissected the decrees. He first stated the decrees in the words of the council and then gave what he calls the "antidote." Having already given the relevant decrees, Calvin's concern over this matter can be seen by noting his reply to

⁶Ibid., p. 34.

⁷Ibid., p. 36.

the first and second decrees of the fourth session of the Council of Trent.

There is an old proverb, --the Romans conquer by sitting. Trusting to this, those degenerate and bastard sons of the Roman See, i.e., the great harlot, sat down to conquer when they appointed the third session. For what hinders them from raising a trophy, and coming off victorious to their hearts' content, if we concede to them what they have comprehended in one decree? There are four heads: First, they ordain that in doctrine we are not to stand on Scripture alone, but also on things handed down by tradition. Secondly, in forming a catalogue of Scripture, they mark all the books with the same chalk, and insist on placing the Apocrypha in the same rank with the others. Thirdly, repudiating all other versions whatsoever, they retain the Vulgate only, and order it to be authentic. Lastly, in all passages either dark or doubtful, they claim the right of interpretation without challenge. These four things being established, who can deny that the war is ended? Wherefore, their after discussions were more for ostentation than from any necessity for them; for whatever they produce, if supported by no authority of Scripture, will be classed among traditions, which they insist should have the same authority as the Law and the Prophets. What, then, will it be permitted to disapprove? for there is no gross old wife's dream which this pretext will not enable them to defend; nay, there is no superstition, however, monstrous, in front of which they may not place it like a shield of Ajax. Add to this, that they provide themselves with new supports when they give full authority to the Apocryphal books. Out of the second of the Maccabees they will prove Purgatory and the worship of saints; out of Tobit satisfactions, exorcisms, and what not. From Ecclesiasticus they will borrow not a little. For from whence could they better draw their dregs? I am not one of those, who would entirely disapprove the reading of those books, however; but in giving them an authority which they never before possessed, what end was sought but just to have the use of spurious paint in colouring their errors?⁸

⁸Ibid., pp. 67-68.

Calvin continued by pointing out the Romanist position on legitimate interpretation.

One thing still was wanting; for disagreeable men were always springing up, who, when anything was brought into question, could not be satisfied without Scripture proof! There are others too clear-sighted, since even in the Vulgate translation they find weapons wherewith to annoy the Papacy. That they may not sustain loss from this quarter, they devise a most excellent remedy, when they adjudge to themselves the legitimate interpretation of Scripture. Who can now imagine any improvidence in them? By one article they have obtained the means of proving what they please out of Scripture, and escaping from every passage that might be used against them.⁹

Calvin's brilliant skill in polemics is seen in the next paragraph:

Against opposing arguments they will set up this brazen wall -- Who are you to question the interpretation of the Church?

This, no doubt, is what they mean by a saying common among them, the Scripture is a nose of wax, because it can be formed into all shapes. If postulates of this kind were given to mathematicians, they would not only make an ell an inch, but prove a mile shorter than an ell, till they had thrown everything into confusion.¹⁰

After rejecting the statement of the Council of Trent as to the value of the *ἀγράφα*, (unwritten) as the source of doctrine, Calvin discussed the canon.

Of their admitting all the Books promiscuously into the Canon, I say nothing more than it is done against the consent of the primitive Church. It is well known what Jerome states as the

⁹Ibid., pp. 68-69.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 69.

common opinion of earlier times. And Ruffinus, speaking of the matter as not at all controverted, declares with Jerome that Ecclesiasticus, the Wisdom of Solomon, Tobit, Judith, and the history of the Maccabees, were called by the Fathers not canonical but ecclesiastical books, which might indeed be read to the people, but were not entitled to establish doctrine. I am not, however, unaware that the same view on which the Fathers of Trent now insist was held in the Council of Carthage. The same, too, was followed by Augustine in his Treatise on Christian Doctrine; but as he testifies that all of his age did not take the same view, let us assume that the point was then undecided. But if it were to be decided by arguments drawn from the case itself, many things beside the phraseology would shew that those Books which the Fathers of Trent raise so high must sink to a lower place. Not to mention other things, whoever it was that wrote the history of the Maccabees expresses a wish, at the end, that he may have written well and congruously; but if not, he asks pardon. How very alien this acknowledgment from the majesty of the Holy Spirit!¹¹

Next Calvin dealt with the important question of the right of interpretation.

I come to the right of interpreting, which they arrogate to themselves whenever the meaning is doubtful. It is theirs, they say, to give the meaning of Scripture, and we must acquiesce. For everything which they bestow upon the Church they bestow upon themselves. I acknowledge, indeed, that as Scripture came not by the private will of man, (2 Peter i. 21,) it is unbecoming to wrest it to the private sense of any man. Nay, in the case of an obscure passage, when it is doubtful what sense ought to be adopted, there is no better way of arriving at the true meaning than for pious doctors to make common inquiry, by engaging in religious discussion. But that is not now the question. They wish, by their tyrannical edict, to deprive the Church of all liberty, and arrogate to themselves a boundless license; for, by the meaning which they affix to Scripture what it may, it must be

¹¹Ibid., pp. 70-71.

immediately embraced. Except themselves, moreover, no man will be permitted to prove anything out of Scripture. Would that they were equal to the performance of so great a task. But oxen usurp the reins, or rather asses the lyre. In short, their aim is to make all revere a Scripture hidden in darkness like the mysteries of Ceres, and let none presume to aspire to the understanding of it.¹²

Most interesting and somewhat amusing are the examples of distorted interpretation which Calvin listed in his polemic against the papists.

There would be no end were I to collect all the examples which would make it plain to my readers what fetters of iniquitous and intolerable slavery are forged by this decree. I will therefore give a specimen, in the case of only one Council. About the year 800 was held a Council of Nice, which both restored Images that had been overthrown under Leo and decreed that they were to be worshipped. That Council, because it supports idolatry, the Papists deem holy and lawful. Hence, according to their axiom, it cannot have erred in the exposition of Scripture. But if such interpreters of sacred things are to be listened to, (it is abominable to say they are,) the religion of the Egyptians will be preferable to the Christian. To prove from Scripture that churches were properly adorned with images and pictures, the following passages were adduced:--"God created man after his own image and likeness;" "Joshua erected twelve stones;" "No man lighteth a candle and putteth it under a bushel;" from whence they inferred that images were to be placed upon altars! Again, "The light of thy countenance has been stamped upon us;" "as we have heard, so have we also seen;" "O Lord, I have loved the beauty of thy house;" "Shew me thy face, for it is lovely." In support of adoration, they wrested the following passages:--"Abraham worshipped the people of the land;" "Jacob set up an inscription, and blessed." Again, "He worshipped the top of the staff of his son Joseph;" "All the rich among the people will deprecate thy countenance;" "Worship his footstool;" "God is to be admired in his saints." And that nothing might be wanting to crown their effrontery, they appended out of another psalm,

¹²Ibid., pp. 74-75.

"His saints who are on the earth." This they applied to images!

I am aware that the narrative I now give will scarcely seem credible. I was myself amazed when I read it, though our ears should long ago have been trained by them to any absurdities, however enormous. Were I to collect all their interpretations, which even children would laugh at, and not even all, but those which are distinguished by some notable absurdity, I would require to form a volume thrice as large as the Bible.¹³

In the concluding paragraph of the Antidote to the decrees of the fourth session, Calvin revealed something of the extent of his agitation over the matter of authority.

The sum is, that the spirit of Trent wished, by this decree, that Scripture should only signify to us whatever dreaming monks might choose. For what else do they mean by the Church? . . . They cry out that the whole authority of the Church must fall if it is denied the right of interpreting Scripture--that a door would thus be thrown open to lascivious minds, allowing them to break through every restraint. Nay, in order to cast obloquy upon us, they are wont to charge us with arrogating the interpretation of Scripture to ourselves, in order that there may be no check on our licentiousness. Modesty will not allow me to speak of ourselves as fact would justify; and yet I will most truly declare that we have thrown more light upon the Scriptures than all the doctors who have appeared under the Papacy since its commencement. This praise even they themselves dare not deny us. Still there is none of us who does not willingly submit his lucubrations to the judgment of the Church; nor do we give loose reins to men to dare what they please. I wish they would shew us such a Church as Scripture itself portrays; we should easily agree as to the respect due to it. But when, falsely assuming the name of Church, they seize upon the spoils of which they have robbed it, what else can we do than protest?¹⁴

¹³Ibid., pp. 75-76.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 76-77.

Closely connected with Calvin's criticism of the Council of Trent was his criticism of the "Adultero-German Interim." After defeating the Smalkaldian League, Emperor Charles V imposed on the Protestants in Germany a compromise confession of faith to be used until the final decision of the General Council. It was drawn up by two Catholic bishops and was proclaimed with an earnest exhortation by the Emperor in 1548. It expressed the whole Roman Catholic system of doctrine in a mild and conciliatory form and without a definite condemnation of the Protestant views.¹⁵

Calvin published the imperial proclamation and the text of the "Adultero-German Interim" in full and then answered it. The portion of the "Interim" which deals more directly with religious authority is chapter 11. In order that Calvin's reply may be appreciated, portions of chapter 11 of the "Interim" are given.

Although the Scripture, as Christ says, cannot be broken, and is therefore immovable, and greater than all human authority, still the authority of distinguishing between true and spurious Scriptures belonged to the Church. Hence is that Canon of Scripture which distinguished the genuine from the false writings which were obtruded under the name of the disciples and apostles of the Lord.

And as the Church always had power and authority in this matter, so had it also of interpreting, and so of exploring and ex-

¹⁵Schaff, History of the Christian Church, op. cit., pp. 602-03.

tracting, doctrines from the same Scriptures, as she never is without the Holy Spirit to lead her into all truth, as Christ himself hath promised. Hence the words of Peter, "No prophecy of Scripture is of self-interpretation; but holy men of God spake as they were inspired by the Holy Spirit." And this power of interpreting is most necessary in those matters which are difficult to be understood, as the thing itself teaches. (John xiv.; 2 Pet. i.)

The Church, besides, has traditions brought down from Christ and his Apostles by the hands of the Bishops, even to our own times. He who tears them up denies that she is the pillar and ground of the truth. Of this class are the baptism of infants, etc. . . .¹⁶

Omitting the section on excommunication, the remainder of the eleventh chapter of the "Interim" follows:

And if doubtful questions arise in the Church, she has the power of judging of the same, and decreeing, and that by a Council, and what this Council lawfully assembled in the Holy Spirit decrees, the Holy Spirit himself seems to decree, according to the words of the Council of Jerusalem: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts xv.) Therefore, that the authority of Councils is most salutary no man ought to doubt.

And as is perceived from the same Council of Jerusalem, the Church has also power to frame Canons, and that for the advantage of the Church, whose power is all for edification and not for destruction.¹⁷

In his reply to the "Adultero-German Interim" which is entitled The True Method of Giving Peace to Christendom and Reforming the Church, Calvin concerned himself with the problem of reli-

¹⁶ Calvin's Tracts, III, 206.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 206-07.

gious authority as well as other problems. The following statements illustrate Calvin's concern over the Roman Catholic claim in the field of authority.

When they come to the authority of the Church, whatever be the false colours with which our mediators delude the eyes of the ignorant, they are at last reduced to this, that instead of the word of God, human license alone is to prevail. Their threefold chime is well known. It belongs to the Church to discriminate between spurious and genuine Scriptures; she also has the right of interpreting Scripture: her traditions have the force of oracles. Where these foundations have been laid, it is plain that the power of which God has been robbed is transferred to horns and mitres. Be their conduct what it may, provided they are adorned with an episcopal title, they constitute the Church.

Moreover, boundless license will be given them, if they are to interpret Scripture at will, frame Articles of Faith, and impose laws on the conscience. In such a case, what will be left for God? This is more than manifest treachery to the kingdom of Christ, sound doctrine, and our salvation. And will they cry out that we are fomenting discord, hindering and disturbing peace, if we do not forthwith assent? That it is the proper office of the Church to distinguish genuine from spurious Scripture, I deny not, and for this reason, that the Church obediently embraces whatever is of God. The sheep hear the voice of the shepherd, and will not listen to the voice of strangers. But to submit the sound oracles of God to the Church, that they may obtain a kind of precarious authority among men, is blasphemous impiety. The Church is, as Paul declares, founded on the doctrine of Apostles and Prophets; but these men speak as if they imagined that the mother owed her birth to the daughter.¹⁸

Calvin's reply continued with some statements in regard to the canon and the right of interpretation.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 266-67.

The object they aim at is notorious. They refer to a Canon. First, I ask, at what time they suppose it to have been published? There is no mention of it in the Council of Nice; and yet the Holy Fathers then were armed with strong enough weapons against Arius, as they had the Scriptures in their hands. Secondly, what will become of the law and the prophetic books, if their authority continued in suspense till a decision was pronounced two thousand years after the law was given? They insist that the books of the Maccabees, Tobit, and others of the same stamp, are to be held authoritative, because they are contained in their vulgar Canon. But in regard to the Canon itself, which they so superciliously intrude upon us, ancient writers are not agreed. Let the mediators, then, enjoy their own as they please, provided we are at liberty to repudiate those which all men of sense, at least, when informed on the subject, will perceive to be not of divine original.

Next comes the right of interpreting, in support of which, as belonging to their fancied Church, the mediators adduce the testimony of Peter, that no Scripture is of private interpretation, because the Prophets did not speak of themselves but as they were impelled by the Holy Spirit. Their inference will avail them little with intelligent men. Peter admonishes us that the prophecies can now be no more understood by the perspicacity of the human mind than they could at first have been composed by it. He therefore exhorts, that as they came down from heaven, so we should pray to have their genuine meaning opened to us by the Spirit of God. Nothing is to be given to ambition--nothing to arrogance. But does it thence follow that a right of interpreting has been conveyed to a few? They also bring forward, that the Spirit was promised to the Church to guide her unto all truth, and bring to mind whatever Christ had taught. But while they, in the meantime, rob the Church of what was given her by Christ, does not their deceit deserve to be exposed?¹⁹

The last part of Calvin's reply to the "Adultero-German Interim" is concerned with tradition. It is as follows:

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 267-68.

The third part of ecclesiastical power our mediators place in the sanctuary of doctrines as well as laws. The former species they call Traditions, which, if any one disowns, he, in their opinion, denies that the Church is the foundation of the truth. By this trap miserable souls are ensnared, and dare not reject any superstition whatever which has prevailed for a long period of time.²⁰

There is still another dispute in which Calvin was involved which dealt with the problem of religious authority and which revealed Calvin's concern with the teaching of the Roman Church on religious authority. In March of 1542 the theological faculty of the University of Paris published a summary of the most obnoxious doctrines of the Roman Church in twenty-five articles. These articles were sanctioned by an edict of the King of France and were to be accepted by all candidates for the priesthood.²¹ Calvin republished these twenty-five articles, and after each article wrote an ironical defense and then a scriptural antidote. Included in Calvin's refutation of these articles were some examples of his attitude toward the problem of religious authority. In the introductory section Calvin had an ironic comment on the general subject of authority.

First, the place ought to have very great authority in the

²⁰Ibid., p. 268.

²¹The French text of these articles is found in CO, VII, Proleg., IX-XII. The English text is found in Calvin's Tracts, I, 71-120.

Church; and although our masters are deficient in proofs from Scripture, they compensate the defect by another authority which they have, viz., that of the Church, which is equivalent to Scripture, or even (according to the Doctors) surpasses it in certainty.²²

In his antidote to the introductory section of the articles, Calvin made much use of the Scripture to refute the papist idea of authority.

Moreover, he (Paul) elsewhere declares, that "faith cometh by the word of God," (Rom. x. 17.) For which reason, he, in another place, also teaches that believers ought to be built "upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets," (Eph. ii. 20.) And he exhorts the Colossians to continue in the faith grounded and settled, and not to be moved away from the hope of the gospel which they had heard, (Col. i. 23.) Hence, too, the Thessalonians are deservedly commended by Luke, (Acts xvii. 11.) because, though they had with great readiness of mind embraced the doctrine of Paul, they, notwithstanding, brought it to the test of Scripture. . . . And it is this which the Lord commands by Jeremiah, "He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully," (Jer. xxiii. 28). Likewise by Peter, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God," (1. Pet. iv. 11.) Therefore, whenever any controversy arises, the proper course is not to settle or decide it by the will of man, but to set it at rest by the authority of God only. Paul gives intimation of this when he arms us against Satan with no other sword than the "word of God," (Eph. vi. 17.) Christ also points out the same thing to us by his own example. When assailed by Satan, the only resistance which he opposed to him was passages of Scripture, (Matth. iv. 4.) Nor otherwise would the eulogium which Paul pronounces upon it be true, when he declares that it is profitable not only for doctrine and reproof, but for correction, (2 Tim. iii. 16.) Now, therefore, that the world is in tumult from contending opinions, this is the only remedy that we must use. We must, I say, flee to Scripture, or, as Isaiah calls it, (Is. viii. 20,) "to the law and to the testimony," as a sacred anchor, that, in accordance with the Apostle's precept, "we may be like minded one toward an-

²² Calvin's Tracts, I. 71-72.

other," but still "according to Christ Jesus," (Rom. xv. 5.) In the admirable words of Augustine, -- "When an obscure matter is under dispute, no aid being offered by clear and certain passages of sacred Scripture, human presumption, which gains nothing by leaning to either side, ought to restrain itself," (Lib. ii. De Peccator. Merit. et Remiss. in fin.). Therefore, in the controverted questions of the present day, let us follow the counsel which, according to Theodoret, (Lib. i. Hist. Eccles. cap. 7.) Constantine gave to the Bishops at the Council of Nice--let us seek their determination from the pure oracles of God.²³

Article 19 contends that the visible Church has the right to define doctrine and to settle any controversy which arises with regard to anything in the Scriptures. Calvin's answer to this article is positive and to the point.

A definite rule, as far as regards particular Churches, is prescribed to us by Paul, when he says, (I Cor. xix. 29,) "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace." If any dissension arise among the Churches, we acknowledge that the legitimate method of establishing concord, which has always been observed, is for the pastors to assemble and define from the word of God what is to be followed. But if we are to hold the determinations of the visible Church for oracles, it was the visible Church which Micah stood alone in resisting, (I Kings xxii. 10.) It was also the visible Church which said, "Come and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor the counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet," (Jer. xviii. 18.) In short, in the time of Christ, the visible Church was represented by the high priest and his council (John xviii. 28.) For their hierarchy was much better founded, and was confirmed by a surer testimony than that on which those who in the present day usurp the title of Church plume themselves. Those, therefore, who will have their definition of the visible Church to be received indiscrimi-

²³Ibid., pp. 72-73.

nately, and without exception, lay the faithful under the necessity of denying Christ, abandoning the truth of God, and oftentimes adhering to impiety.²⁴

The twentieth article proposed by the theological faculty of Paris affirmed that tradition is to be accepted along with the sacred Scriptures. Calvin's vehement protest is another example of his concern over the Roman Catholic emphasis in the realm of authority:

We ought, therefore, to stand fast in the doctrine in which we know that all the fulness of heavenly wisdom is included. On this very ground does Augustine decide, that nothing not delivered in the Scriptures is necessary to salvation, (Lib. ii. De Pecc. Mer. et Remiss. cap. ult.) For, if it were necessary to be known, God would not have omitted it. There is also a remarkable sentence of Chrysostom, (De Sanct. et Ador. in Spiritu,) "As Christ declares that he spoke not of himself, because he spoke from the law and the prophets; so, if any thing beside the gospel is obtruded upon us under the name of the Spirit, let us not believe it. For as Christ is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, so is the Spirit the fulfillment of the Gospel." On the whole, since the certainty of faith should be sought from none but God only, we conclude that true faith is founded only on the Scriptures which proceeded from him, since therein he has been pleased to teach not partially, but fully, whatever he wished us to know, and knew to be useful.²⁵

That Calvin was greatly upset by his controversies with the Roman Church over the problem of religious authority is attested by numerous statements in many of his other writings. Chapter 8 of the

²⁴ Ibid., p. 104.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 105-06.

fourth book of the Institutes is largely devoted to the question of the unbridled license of the Roman Church in destroying purity of doctrine. A good sample of Calvin's thought can be found in the tenth section.

Meanwhile, at their own caprice, and in contempt of the word of God, they coin doctrines to which they in this way demand our assent, declaring that no man can be a Christian unless he assent to all their dogmas, affirmative as well as negative, if not with explicit, yet with implicit faith, because it belongs to the Church to frame new articles of faith.²⁶

Chapter 9 of the fourth book of the Institutes considers the question of councils and their authority. Chapter 10 of the fourth book deals with the problem of tradition and the cruelty of the Pope and his adherents in tyrannically oppressing and destroying souls through traditions. In this chapter another evidence of Calvin's agitation over this question is seen.

Our aim is to curb the unlimited and barbarous empire usurped over souls by those who would be thought pastors of the Church, but who are in fact its most cruel murderers. They say that the laws which they enact are spiritual, pertaining to the soul, and they affirm that they are necessary to eternal life. . . . They must acknowledge Christ their deliverer, as their only king, and be ruled by the only law of liberty--namely, the sacred word of the Gospel--if they would retain the grace which they have once received in Christ: they must be subject to no bondage, be bound by no chains.²⁷

²⁶IV, viii, 10.

²⁷IV, x, 1.

In the Commentaries Calvin gave many examples of the way in which his controversy with the Romanists aroused his anger. In commenting on Galatians 4:26, Calvin maintained that

... the Papists are fools and twice children, who expect to give us uneasiness by producing these words; for their mother is an adulteress, who brings forth to death the children of the devil; and how foolish is the demand, that the children of God should surrender themselves to her to be cruelly slain! Might not the synagogue of Jerusalem at that time have assumed such haughty pretensions, with far higher plausibility than Rome at the present time? And yet we see how Paul strips her of every honourable distinction, and consigns her to the lot of Hagar.²⁸

Another striking example of Calvin's attitude can be seen in "The

Epistle Dedicatory" of the commentary on Acts. This epistle was dedicated to Lord Nicolas Radziwill of Lithuania and was written in 1560. Following are excerpts from this dedication:

Now, on the other side, the ungodliness of other enemies ought to sharpen your study (and earnestness,) I mean the preachers of Antichrist of Rome, who, to the end they may deceive the ignorant, do continually, with shrill voice, sound out the name of the Church. . . . they, under false colour of honour, do make the shadowish name of the Church subject to their lusts; we do so reverence the Church from our heart, that we account it great wickedness to profane the sacred name thereof. . . . The hireling flatterers of the Pope do cry out that they have the Church; but we can know by no means better, whether this be true or no, than when we look unto the head. As for that, it is manifest that it is cut off by their sacrilegious violence. For how shall Christ retain the place of the head, being despoiled of all his power, thrown down from his government, deprived of his

²⁸Com. Gal. 4:26.

dignity? . . . But if the Pope, oppressing men's consciences with his fierce and more cruel tyranny, have disannulled and taken away Christ his government; if he have invented a new and strange priesthood, that he may thrust in himself, being but a mortal man, to be the mediator between God and the world; if he have forged daily sacrifices, that he may put them in Christ's place; if he have invented a thousand satisfactions for sins; if he have brought feigned washings from the lake of hell, to make dry the blood of the Son of God; if he have put in his place infinite patrons; if he have torn in a thousand pieces that righteousness which must be set (sought) wholly from him; if, instead of the Holy Ghost, he has erected man's free-will; it is, without all question, that the true Christ is banished from Papistry. For this cause have I said that the Papists make boast of a dead carcase instead of the lively body of Christ, because, though they have extinguished the doctrine of the gospel, (which is the true soul of the Church, and which duly doth quicken the same,) yet they do greatly boast of a shadowish and trifling kind of Church.²⁹

As if this would not be enough, Calvin continued in "The Epistle Dedicatory" of Acts to discuss the church councils and the apostasy of Rome.

And now after that the Pope hath gathered together the bran and chips of his unclean and filthy rotten flock, shall the representative Church suddenly appear there? And are they not yet ashamed to call that an holy, general, and lawful Council, which doth not deserve so much as to be called a vain and comical visor of a Council? But as for us, to whom the promise is made, that Antichrist, who sitteth in the temple of God, shall be destroyed with the breath of the Lord's mouth; let not us (I say) cease to refute this filthy and whorish impudency, with that most sacred word which they so boldly mock, that all men may see what difference there is between the chaste spouse of Christ and the stinking whore of Belial; between the sanctuary of God and the brothel-house of Satan; between the spiritual house of the godly

²⁹Com. Acts. "The Epistle Dedicatory."

and the sty of hogs; and, finally, between the true Church and the court of Rome. There can be no more certain or plain demonstration brought concerning this matter either by Euclid, either yet by Archimedes, than if the Church, as Luke describeth it, be compared with the Popish synagogue.³⁰

Although many other examples could be cited, it is believed that the illustrations given reveal that Calvin was indeed concerned with the teaching on religious authority presented by the Roman Catholic Church. Involvement in such a controversy could not help but affect his utilization of the historical principle of biblical exegesis.

3. The problem presented by the emphasis of the radical sects on private revelations.

(1) Problem of religious authority presented by the radical sects. The task of differentiating between the different types of radical sects which were existent in the sixteenth century is very difficult yet very important. Carew Hunt³¹ points out that "Anabaptism" as a name is no more than a general term which covers a number of heterogeneous sectarian tendencies. Bullinger³² enumerates thirteen

³⁰Loc. cit.

³¹R. N. Carew Hunt, Calvin (London: Centenary Press, 1933).

³²Heinrich Bullinger, Der Wiedertäufer Ursprung (Zurich: 1560), pp. 17-55.

distinct sects within the Anabaptist body. Newman's³³ classification of the Anabaptist parties is based upon the different types of life and thought exemplified by them: the Chiliastic Anabaptists, the soundly Biblical Anabaptists, the Mystical Anabaptists, the Pantheistic Anabaptists, and the Anti-trinitarian Anabaptists.

Thus it is seen that the radical sects differed considerably among themselves in spirit, aim, and points of doctrine. To a large extent, Calvin disagreed with the Anabaptist teachings on individual responsibility to God, freedom of will, the church, the state, magistracy, oaths, war, communism, organization, worship, ordinances, Christology, and eschatology. However, in this section on religious authority the primary interest is in the emphasis of the more extreme radical sects on private revelations and the inner light and the possible influence which these emphases had on Calvin's use of the historical principle of biblical exegesis.

Undoubtedly the majority of the Anabaptists held that the Scriptures constituted the supreme rule of faith and practice. The majority also maintained that the believer must test the supposed voice of the Spirit in the soul with the teaching of the written word.³⁴

³³A. H. Newman, A Manual of Church History (Philadelphia: 1903), II, 156.

³⁴R. J. Smithson, The Anabaptists (London: James Clarke and Co., 1935), pp. 122, 123, 137.

Some, however, went sadly astray. Strictly speaking, the Zwickau Prophets were not Anabaptists.³⁵ They were, however, the forerunners of some of the extreme Anabaptists. The Zwickau Prophets advocated a wild millenarianism. Closely associated with the Zwickau Prophets was Thomas Münzer (b. about 1490). He was decidedly psychopathic, given to "visions," and conscious of immediate "inspiration."³⁶ Melchior Hoffman (d. 1543) was another leader of the apocalyptic type. He interpreted Bible texts by far-fetched allegories and believed himself inspired. He had a revelation that the New Jerusalem was to come in the city of Strasbourg.³⁷

One of the chief things which distinguished Hans Denck (d. 1527) from some other Anabaptist leaders was his teaching on the inner light. He denied depravity and taught that there is something divine in every man. Scripture is not the one and absolute rule of faith.³⁸ An important insight into Denck's views on private revela-

³⁵J. Mackinnon, Luther and the Reformation (London: 1930), IV, 41.

³⁶Rufus M. Jones, Studies in Mystical Religion (London: Macmillan and Co., 1909), p. 389.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 390-91. Also cf. Herman Krohn, Essai sur la vie et les écrits de M. Hofmann (Strasbourg: 1852).

³⁸Alfred Coutts, Hans Denck (Edinburgh: Macniven and Wallace, 1927), pp. 108-09.

tion and the inner light is given in Denck's dying testimony Widerruf.

The Holy Scriptures I consider above every human treasure, but not so high as the Word of God which is living, powerful, and eternal, for it is God Himself, Spirit and no letter, written without pen or paper so that it can never be destroyed. For that reason, salvation is not bound up with the Scriptures, however necessary and good they may be for their purpose, because it is impossible for the Scriptures to make good a bad heart, even though it may be a learned one. A good heart, however, with a Divine Spark in it is improved by everything, and to such the Scriptures will bring blessedness and goodness.³⁹

Closely akin to Hans Denck in their teaching on the inner light were Johann Bunderlin⁴⁰ and Christian Entfelder.⁴¹ In the first half of the sixteenth century it was generally agreed that the Scripture was the only basis of authority in religious faith and practice. These two men, as did Denck, challenged this emphasis as a dangerous return to a lower form of religion than that to which Christ had called men and as only legalism and scribism in a new dress. They insisted that the eternal Spirit is a real presence in the depth of men's consciousness and is ceaselessly voicing himself there as a living word,

³⁹Hans Denck, Widerruf (1527), p. 1--quoted by Jones, Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (London: Macmillan and Co., 1914), pp. 28-29.

⁴⁰Alexander Nicoladoni, Johannes Bunderlin von Linz und die oberösterreichischen Täufergemeinden in den Jahren 1525-1531 (Berlin: 1893).

⁴¹Mennonitisches Lexikon (Frankfurt: 1913---), I, 594 f.

whom it is life to obey and death to disregard and slight.⁴²

The chief reformers held both Testaments to be authoritative as the rule for the faith and practice of the Christian church. A variation of this orthodox view was the view held by Menno Simons (d. 1561). He held that the church must conform itself not to the Old Testament, but to the New Testament standard.⁴³

In the year 1534 the Münster uprising took place. As details became public, the name "Anabaptist" became a synonym for violence, outrage, rebellion, and sensuality. A common designation was given to all preachers of the Anabaptists--rotgeesten (riotous spirits).⁴⁴ The fanaticism reached such a height that some thirty thousand Anabaptists had been put to death in Holland and Friesland by 1546.⁴⁵

Enough evidence has been given to show that in the first half

⁴²Jones, Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, op. cit., pp. 44-45.

⁴³Menno Simons, Complete Works of Menno Simons (Elkhart, Ind.: 1871), Part One.

⁴⁴Smithson, op. cit., pp. 85-86.

⁴⁵H. T. Buckle, History of Civilization (London: 1873), I, 189. Also cf. E. Belfort Bax, The Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists (London: 1903), and Richard Heath, Anabaptism--from its Rise at Zwickau to its Fall at Münster, 1521-1536 (London: 1895).

of the sixteenth century the emphasis on private revelations and the inner light by the extremists among the radical sects presented a definite problem in the realm of religious authority. And not the least perturbed by this problem was John Calvin.

(2) Evidence that Calvin was greatly concerned with the emphasis of the radical sects on private revelations and the inner light. From Calvin's own writings it is quite evident that the teaching of the radical sects on religious authority greatly aroused him. In the Institutes, chapter 9 of the first book is entitled "All the Principles of Piety Subverted by Fanatics, Who Substitute Revelation for Scripture." Excerpts from this chapter reveal Calvin's concern.

Those who, rejecting Scripture, imagine that they have some peculiar way of penetrating to God, are to be deemed not so much under the influence of error as madness. For certain giddy men have lately appeared, who, while they make a great display of the superiority of the Spirit, reject all reading of the Scriptures themselves, and deride the simplicity of those who only delight in what they call the dead and deadly letter. But I wish they would tell me what spirit it is whose inspiration raises them to such a sublime height that they dare despise the doctrine of Scripture as mean and childish.⁴⁶

Defending the finality of the Scriptures, Calvin continued to attack the radical sects.

⁴⁶I, ix, 1.

What an infatuation of the devil, therefore, to fancy that Scripture, which conducts the sons of God to the final goal, is of transient and temporary use? Again, I should like those people to tell me whether they have imbibed any other Spirit than that which Christ promised to his disciples. Though their madness is extreme, it will scarcely carry them the length of making this their boast.⁴⁷

Calvin next defended the view that the Spirit does not lead beyond the Scriptures.

But they say that it is insulting to subject the Spirit, to whom all things are to be subject, to the Scripture: as if it were disgraceful to the Holy Spirit to maintain a perfect resemblance throughout, and be in all respects without variation consistent with himself.⁴⁸

Calvin concludes this discussion by pointing out that one cannot have true illumination apart from the Word of God.

Their cavil about our cleaving to the dead letter carries with it the punishment which they deserve for despising Scripture. . . . How is this answered by those swelling enthusiasts, in whose idea the only true illumination consists, in carelessly laying aside, and bidding adieu to the Word of God, while, with no less confidence than folly, they fasten upon any dreaming notion which may have casually sprung up in their minds? Surely a very different sobriety becomes the children of God. As they feel that without the Spirit of God they are utterly devoid of the light of truth, so they are not ignorant that the word is the instrument by which the illumination of the Spirit is dispensed. They know of no other Spirit than the one who dwelt and spake in the apostles--the Spirit by whose oracles they are daily invited to the hearing of the Word.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Loc. cit.

⁴⁸l. ix, 2.

⁴⁹Loc. cit.

In chapter 7 of the first book of the Institutes another statement is found which apparently was provoked by the teaching of the radical sects. "But since no daily responses (oracles) are given from heaven, . . . the Scriptures are the only records in which God has been pleased to consign his truth to perpetual remembrance. . . .⁵⁰

In his sermons on Deuteronomy, Calvin pointed out that under the Anabaptists, liberty had been perverted and had degenerated into license. The Anabaptists are like brigands, he affirmed, and we must reckon them the enemies of the salvation of men. They war on each other and come to a horrible confusion.⁵¹ Calvin demonstrated his concern even more forcefully in one of his sermons on I Timothy.

It is true that they pretend to be spiritual; but they are devils who attempt to pervert all humanity, and throw it into such horrible confusion that it would be better that men should become brute beasts or men-wolves than to have such a mixture.⁵²

The strong emphasis on civil order, which is found in the writings of Calvin, undoubtedly is partially accounted for by his controversies with the radical sects. One example of this emphasis on civil order is found in his sermons on Deuteronomy. Although this

⁵⁰I, vii, 1.

⁵¹CO XXVII, 409-10.

⁵²CO LIII, 135.

emphasis is not directly related to the problem of religious authority, it does show how much Calvin was aroused by the fact that the Anabaptists failed to abide by what he considered to be a clear scriptural teaching on civil order.

Our Lord takes so much interest in earthly polity that He means for it to be maintained and he means to see justice in the life of men. Human blood is precious to Him, for men are formed in His image; but He does not spare a man who has turned against civil order . . . ⁵³

Another example of this emphasis on civil order is found in his homilies on I Samuel. Evil and non-Christian governments are both included in his demand for obedience to divinely authorized rulers. The state and church are "not contraries like water and fire, but things conjoined."⁵⁴ This emphasis on civil order is also illustrated by Calvin's comments on Romans 13:1. He calls attention to the fact that the apostle Paul urged obedience to a power that persecuted religion.

And it seems indeed to me, that the Apostle intended by this word to take away the frivolous curiosity of men, who are wont often to inquire by what right they who rule have obtained their authority; but it ought to be enough for us, that they do rule; for they have not ascended by their own power into this high station, but have been placed there by the Lord's hand. And by mentioning every soul, he removes every exception, lest any one should claim an immunity from the common duty of obedience. The rea-

⁵³CO, XXVII, 455.

⁵⁴CO, XXIX, 659.

son why we ought to be subject to magistrates is, because they are constituted by God's ordination. For since it pleases God thus to govern the world, he who attempts to invert the order of God and thus to resist God himself, despises his power; since to despise the providence of him who is the founder of civil power, is to carry on war with him.⁵⁵

In commenting on I Timothy 2:1-2 in connection with the apostle Paul's exhortation that "supplications . . . be made . . . for kings, and for all that are in authority," Calvin revealed his concern over the teachings of the radical sects.

Hence we conclude, that fanatics, who wish to have magistrates taken away, are destitute of all humanity, and breathe nothing but cruel barbarism. How different is it to say, that we ought to pray for kings, in order that justice and decency may prevail, and to say, that not only the name of kingly power, but all government, is opposed to religion! We have the Spirit of God for the Author of the former sentiment, and therefore the latter must be from the Devil.⁵⁶

Calvin's concern over the teaching of the Anabaptists on religious authority can be seen in the Prefatory Address of his Institutes, which was addressed to Francis I of France.

Lastly they are far from candid when they invidiously number up the disturbances, tumults, and disputes, which the preaching of our doctrine has brought in its train, and the fruits which, in many instances, it now produces; for the doctrine itself is undeservedly charged with evils which ought to be ascribed to the malice of Satan. It is one of the characteristics of

⁵⁵Com. Rom. 13:1.

⁵⁶Com. I Tim. 2:2.

the divine word, that whenever it appears, Satan ceases to slumber and sleep. This is the surest and most unerring test for distinguishing it from false doctrines which readily betray themselves, while they are received by all with willing ears, and welcomed by an applauding world. . . . And first he stirred up the hands of men, that by them he might violently suppress the dawning truth; but when this availed him not, he turned to snares, exciting dissensions and disputes about doctrine by means of his Catabaptists, and other portentous miscreants, that he might thus obscure, and, at length, extinguish the truth. And now he persists in assailing it with both engines, endeavouring to pluck up the true seed by the violent hand of man, and striving, as much as in him lies, to choke it with his tares, that it may not grow and bear fruit. But it will be in vain if we listen to the admonition of the Lord, who long ago disclosed his wiles, that he might not be taken unawares, and armed us with full protection against all his machinations. But how malignant to throw upon the word of God itself the blame either of the seditions which wicked men and rebels, or of the sects which imposters stir up against it!⁵⁷

The anxiety aroused in Calvin's mind by the activities of the Anabaptists is readily seen in the last portion of the Prefatory Address of the Institutes.

Be not moved by the absurd insinuations with which our adversaries are striving to frighten you into the belief that nothing else is wished and aimed at by this new gospel (for so they term it), than opportunity for sedition and impunity for all kinds of vice. Our God is not the author of division, but of peace; and the Son of God, who came to destroy the works of the devil, is not the minister of sin. We, too, are undeservedly charged with desires of a kind which we have never given even the smallest suspicion. We, forsooth, meditate the subversion of kingdoms; we, whose voice was never heard in faction, and whose life, while passed under you, is known to have been always quiet and simple;

⁵⁷1. "The Prefatory Address."

even now, when exiled from our home, we nevertheless cease not to pray for all prosperity to your person and your kingdom. We, forsooth, are aiming after an unchecked indulgence in vice, in whose manners, though there is much to be blamed, there is nothing which deserves such an imputation; nor (thank God) have we profited so little in the gospel that our life may not be to these slanderers an example of chastity, kindness, pity, temperance, patience, moderation, or any other virtue. It is plain, indeed, that we fear God sincerely and worship him in truth, since, whether by life or by death, we desire his name to be hallowed; and hatred herself has been forced to bear testimony to the innocence and civil integrity of some of our people on whom death was inflicted for the very thing which deserved the highest praise. But if any, under pretext of the gospel, excite tumults (none such have as yet been detected in your realm), if any use the liberty of the grace of God as a cloak for licentiousness (I know of numbers who do), there are laws and legal punishments by which they may be punished up to the measure of their deserts--only, in the mean time, let not the gospel of God be evil spoken of because of the iniquities of evil men.⁵⁸

Although the Preface to Calvin's tract, "Psychopannychia," is concerned primarily with introducing his treatise on "soul sleeping," it also contains some indirect evidence of Calvin's agitation over the teachings of the Anabaptists on the problem of religious authority.

I wish, therefore, to warn such beforehand not to take anything said as an affront to themselves, but to understand that, whenever I use some freedom of speech, I am referring to the nefarious herd of Anabaptists, from whose fountain this noxious stream did, as I observed, first flow, and against whom nothing I have said equals their deserts. If I am to have a future fight with them, I am determined they shall find me, if not a very

⁵⁸Loc. cit.

skilful, yet certainly a firm, and as I dare promise, by God's grace, an invincible defender of the Truth. And yet against them I have not given immoderate vent to my bile, having constantly refrained from all pertness and petulance of speech; tempering my pen so as to be fitter for teaching than forcing, and yet able to draw such as are unwilling to be led. It was certainly much more my intention to bring all back into the right, than to provoke them to anger.⁵⁹

In the Preface to "Psychopannychia" Calvin continued to affirm that there is only one source of religious authority.

Let us always hang on our Lord's lips, and neither add to His wisdom nor mix up with it anything of our own, lest like leaven it corrupt the whole mass, and make even the very salt which is within us to be without savour. Let us shew ourselves to be such disciples as our Lord wishes to have--poor, empty, and void of self-wisdom; eager to learn by knowing nothing, and even wishing to know nothing but what He has taught; shunning everything of foreign growth as the deadliest poison.

I would here obviate the objections of those who will blame any present undertaking, charging me with stirring up fierce contests about nothing, and making trifling differences the source of violent dissensions: for there are not wanting some who so reproach me. My answer is, that when Divine Truth is avowedly attacked, we must not tolerate the adulteration of one single iota of it. It is certainly no trivial matter to see God's light extinguished by the devil's darkness; and besides, this matter is of greater moment than many suppose. Nor is it true, as they allege, that he who does not acquiesce in the errors of others, shews deadly hate by dissenting from them. I have censured the curiosity of those who would agitate questions which are truly nothing else than mere tortures to the intellect. But after they have stirred this camarina, their temerity must be repressed, lest it should prevail over the truth. Whether I have succeeded in this I know not; it was certainly my wish, and I have done the

⁵⁹Calvin's Tracts, III, 416.

best I could. If others can do better, let them come forward for the public good;⁶⁰

Calvin even called for a public as well as a private test of doctrine in order to combat the teachings of the radical sects. This emphasis is found in his comments on I John 4:1.

Public trial refers to the common consent and polity of the Church; for as there is danger lest fanatics should rise up, who may presumptuously boast that they are endued with the Spirit of God, it is a necessary remedy, that the faithful meet together and seek a way by which they may agree in a holy and godly manner.⁶¹

John Calvin was constantly engaged in combating the emphasis of radical sects on private revelations and the inner light. This unquestionably affected his utilization of the historical principle of biblical exegesis.

4. The problem presented by the humanism and rationalism of the heretics.

(1) Problem of religious authority presented by the humanism and rationalism of the heretics. Calvin was involved in many theological disputes with heretics. This study does not call for a detailed consideration of these disputes. In this section on religious au-

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 418.

⁶¹Com. I Jn. 4:1.

thority the primary interest is in the humanism and rationalism of the heretics and the possible influence which these heretical emphases had on Calvin's use of the historical principle of biblical exegesis.

Many of Calvin's controversies, such as the one with Bolsec, will not even be mentioned since a representative survey is all that is attempted in this study.

Sebastian Castellio (d. 1563) is a representative scholar of the sixteenth century who helped to bring the question of humanism and rationalism to the forefront in connection with the problem of religious authority. In 1551 Castellio completed a Latin translation of the Bible. His object was to present the Bible in classical Latin according to the taste of the late Humanists and intellectuals. He substituted classical terms for biblical terms. Style was important, and so some accuracy of content was sacrificed and Hebraisms were removed. This translation was severely criticized by Calvin and Beza.

They said that it tended to secularize and profane the sacred book.⁶²

Castellio combined a mystical with a skeptical tendency. He was known as a rationalist before Rationalism. Castellio's system of religious knowledge is based on three sources: sense experience, rea-

⁶²Schaff, History of the Christian Church, op. cit., VII, p. 623. Also cf. Ferdinand Buisson, Sébastien Castellion sa vie et son oeuvre (Paris: 1892), 2 Vol.

son, and revelation. Assuming that Castellio wrote the famous book

Concerning Heretics,⁶³ we have a good defense of the validity of rea-

son by Castellio in the section entitled "Concerning Doubt and Belief,

Ignorance and Knowledge."

Then I should like to know why they do use their reason against the plain words of God. . . . Christ said, "Resist not evil." Why then do they, contrary to the Anabaptists, approve of the magistrate when he resists evil? Why do they not rather twist the passage favorable to the magistrate into accord with the plain words of Christ? I do not see what they can answer, nor do they answer anything, to my knowledge, . . . in their sermons and books, other than that reason is to be followed against these words lest an absurdity be admitted. They are right. But if, then, the judgment of reason is to be admitted in this and other matters and is to be preferred to the words, where the case falls within the scope of reason, then they should grant us the same privilege elsewhere if we can show them the case is subject to the judgment and reason and sense. For reason is, so to speak, the daughter of God. She was before letters and ceremonies, and after the world is changed and renewed she will endure and can no more be abolished than God Himself. Reason, I say, is a sort of eternal word of God, much older and surer than letters and ceremonies, according to which God taught His people before there were letters and ceremonies, and after these have passed away He will still so teach that men may be truly taught of God.⁶⁴

In this same work, Concerning Heretics, Castellio has still another section which praises reason. It is easy to see from his statement

⁶³ Sebastian Castellio, Concerning Heretics, trans., Roland H. Bainton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935). Cf. pp. 3-11 for discussion of authorship and occasion.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 296-97.

why he is considered a rationalist.

First we must inquire whether man's sense and intellect were corrupted by the sin of Adam. . . . As for the first, I fear that we are dealing with a general and hoary error, rather than with the truth. There is neither authority nor reason for it. Someone rashly proposed it and then it was kept as an oracle by a blind posterity following the blind. Let our opponents tell which sacred author hands this down? None. What reason teaches it? None. Experience and history teach the contrary. As for experience, we find man's senses of mind and body whole and sound as we have abundantly shown. History, that is, Moses, records that men's eyes opened after tasting of the fruit of the tree of knowledge and they became aware of their hitherto unnoticed nakedness. And rightly, for the tree was properly and not inappropriately called the tree of knowledge. I am positively astounded as to what has come into men's minds, that they should make out of the tree of knowledge a tree of ignorance. What sense was corrupted? Of the body or of the mind? Not of the body. With their eyes our first parents saw that they were naked and with their ears heard the voice of God. Had their senses been corrupted they would not have seen nor heard or would have seen and heard incorrectly, which was not the case. Nor were the senses of the mind corrupted. The judgment that they were naked was a judgment of the mind, seeing and judging through the eyes. . . .⁶⁵

Many of Castellio's teachings were similar to those of Cicero and the Stoics.⁶⁶ His emphasis on reason led him into biblical criticism.

Here it is that Castellio came into conflict with Calvin in an area which involved religious authority. Castellio anticipated the rationalistic criticism of the Song of Solomon and described it as an obscene,

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 298.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 301.

erotic poem which should be removed from the canon.⁶⁷ For this and other reasons Calvin opposed the ordination of Castellio. Castellio became an object of further suspicion because of his translation of Ochino's Dialogues, which contained opinions favorable to Unitarianism and polygamy. Upon his death three Polish Socinians erected a monument to his memory, and Faustus Socinus edited his posthumous works.⁶⁸

Among the Italian Protestants who were compelled to leave Italy because of the Inquisition were some skeptical and anti-trinitarian scholars. Calvin called them "skeptical academicians." Most of them went to Basel. They gave the churches in Switzerland a great deal of trouble. Among other things they rebelled at the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity, Christology, total depravity, and predestination. Some of the more prominent men in this group were Laelius and Faustus Socinus, Ochino, Gribaldo, Alciati, and Gentile.⁶⁹

Laelius Socinus (d. 1562) was constitutionally a skeptic. He was too independent to submit blindly to authority, and yet too reli-

⁶⁷CO, XI, 673-76.

⁶⁸Schaff, History of the Christian Church, op. cit., VII, 626-27.

⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 628-30.

gious to run into infidelity.⁷⁰ Beginning in 1549, Socinus began a correspondence with Calvin on various doctrinal questions.⁷¹ At first Calvin answered fully but soon he began to suspect that Socinus had merely an idle intellectual curiosity about speculative details.⁷² Calvin warned him about the dangers of his skeptical approach.⁷³ Finally Laelius Socinus signed a confession of faith which was composed of vague and equivocal phrases and which does not reveal either what he believed or disbelieved on any of the disputed points. This seemed to protect him against further attacks.⁷⁴ Faustus Socinus, who was the real founder of Socinianism, did not come into personal contact with Calvin. He spent most of his time working among the scattered Unitarians and Anabaptists in Poland.⁷⁵

Bernardino Ochino (d. 1565) began to lose faith in the Roman Church after the age of fifty. At fifty-six he became a Protestant.

⁷⁰Cf. Eugène Burnat, Lelio Socin (Vevey: 1894).

⁷¹CO, XIII, 272 ff., 336 ff.

⁷²CO, XIII, 307 ff., 464 ff.

⁷³CO, XIII, 484-87.

⁷⁴Earl Morse Wilbur, A History of Unitarianism (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1945), p. 245.

⁷⁵Schaff, History of the Christian Church, op. cit., VII, 637.

His last works, Labyrinths (1561) and Thirty Dialogues (1563), were translated into Latin by Castellio and published in Basel.⁷⁶ In these books Ochino deals with the doctrines of predestination, free will, the Trinity, and monogamy in a skeptical and latitudinarian way so that the heretical view seems to be stronger in the argument than the orthodox view.⁷⁷ His dialogue on polygamy seemed to defend polygamy.⁷⁸ In 1563 Ochino was banished from Zurich.⁷⁹ Ochino is often mentioned in the correspondence of Calvin and Bullinger.

Matteo Gribaldo was another Italian scholar from Padua. He held heretical views on the Trinity. It was charged that he believed in three Gods. He seemed to vacillate between this tritheism and a form of Arianism.⁸⁰ Gribaldo criticized Calvin.⁸¹ Calvin wrote to Wolmar

⁷⁶Karl Benrath, Bernardino Ochino of Siena (London: 1877).

⁷⁷Cf. Daniel Bertrand-Barraud, Les idées philosophiques de Bernardin Ochino de Sienne (Paris: 1924), Chap. iii, for fuller discussion.

⁷⁸Bernardini Ochino Senensis, Dialogi xxx, duos libros divisi (Basileae: 1563), Vol. II.

⁷⁹CO, XX, 195.

⁸⁰CO, XV, 246 ff.

⁸¹CO, XXI, 80.

and warned him about the heretical views of Gribaldo.⁸²

Gianpaolo Alciati, another Italian exile, was also heretical in his doctrine of the Trinity. He made the sacrilegious statement that in the Trinity "we worship three devils, worse than all the idols of the Papacy, because we make it three persons."⁸³ Alciati was banished by the Geneva Council.⁸⁴

Giovanni Valentino Gentile (d. 1566), another Italian, contended that Calvin's view of the Trinity was sophistical and involved a quaternity--adding a general divine essence to the three divine essences of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Gentile maintained that the Father was the only divine essence.⁸⁵ These were essentially the ideas of Servetus. Later at Lyon Gentile wrote a book entitled Antidota, in which he opposed Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity and his doctrine of the two natures of Christ. He also held that the Son was subordinate to the Father.⁸⁶

⁸²CO, XV, 644.

⁸³CO, XIX, 40.

⁸⁴CO, XXI, 704, 708.

⁸⁵CO, IX, 389 f.

⁸⁶Cf. Benedictus Aretius, Short History of Valentinus Gentilis the Tritheist (London: 1696).

The best known theological dispute in which Calvin was engaged was the dispute with Michael Servetus (d. 1553). It is not necessary for the purpose of this study to give a detailed account of this controversy.⁸⁷ Only enough details will be given to show the problem in the realm of religious authority that was presented by this controversy. The heretical views of Servetus on the Trinity and the divinity of Christ were openly declared at Basel in 1530.⁸⁸ In 1531 Servetus published Errors of the Trinity.⁸⁹ This book was considered to be blasphemous by both the Protestants and the Catholics. Servetus found endless points in Calvin's writings which he said were hopelessly wrong.⁹⁰ His chief theological work, The Restitution of Christianity, was evidently an answer to Calvin's Institutes. In the Restitution Servetus affirmed that he must overthrow the tyranny of both the papal and Protestant antichrists and restore Christianity to its primitive pu-

⁸⁷For the literature on Servetus, cf. Bainton, "The Present State of Servetus Studies," Journal of Modern History, IV (1932), 72-79.

⁸⁸CO, VIII, 857-62.

⁸⁹English Translation by Wilbur (Cambridge, 1932).

⁹⁰CO, VIII, 481.

city.⁹¹ To his contemporaries The Restitution of Christianity appeared to be a confused compound of Sabellian, Samosatenic, Arian, Apollinarian, and Pelagian heresies mixed with Anabaptist errors and Neoplatonic, pantheistic speculations.⁹² Servetus regarded the Bible as the source of religious truth but promulgated interpretations which were considered humanistic and radical by the other reformers.

(2) Evidence that Calvin was greatly concerned with the humanistic and rationalistic emphases of the heretics. In the presentation of the problem in the realm of religious authority created by the humanists and rationalists, some indication of Calvin's concern was seen. It will be helpful to give some additional representative examples to indicate the extent of Calvin's concern.

Calvin thought of Castellio as the center of a conspiracy of liberals. He saw Castellio as a beast as poisonous as he was wild and stubborn.⁹³ Castellio answered in his Contra Libellum

⁹¹The more important aspects of The Restitution of Christianity are summarized in Émile Doumergue, Jean Calvin, les hommes et les choses de son temps (Neuilly-sur-Seine: 1927), VI, 224-53.

⁹²Schaff, History of the Christian Church, op. cit., VII, 736.

⁹³CO. XV, 209.

Calvin⁹⁴ and pointed out Calvin's inconsistencies, self-contradictions, forced interpretations in his own interest, and preference for the rigid Old Testament law over the Christian law of love.⁹⁵ Calvin gave his opinion of Castellio in a letter to Sulzer, which was written on August 7, 1554.

Castalio, believe me, is a creature not less malignant, than unmanageable and contumacious. Under the mask of charity and even of modesty, he dissembles the most inconceivable arrogance. He and some others patched up that pamphlet stuffed with the most atrocious outrages against me, with the intention of its causing some sudden attack to be made upon me. They have been egregiously mistaken, for the senate voted that the work should be given to me for my perusal, and it was an easy task for me, not only to dissipate those clouds of slander, but even to make redound to my honor, what they had so odiously reproached me with.⁹⁶

In a letter to Tossanus on October 15, 1554, Calvin revealed his concern about his controversy with Castellio and his other difficulties.

"If you knew only a tenth part of how distressed I am by violent abuse," he wrote to the minister at Montbellard, "your human feeling would make you groan at the afflictions to which I have had to harden myself. The dogs are yelping at me from every quarter. On all sides I am being called a heretic. Every

⁹⁴Buisson, Sébastien Castellion sa vie et son oeuvre, op. cit., II, 32.

⁹⁵Wilbur, op. cit., p. 203.

⁹⁶Jules Bonnet, Letters of John Calvin (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1858), III, 52-53.

slander that can be invented is being heaped upon me. Envious and spiteful men even of our own flock are attacking me more outrageously than our open enemies among the Papists."⁹⁷

Calvin's concern over the speculations of Laelius Socinus is seen in a letter written to Socinus in 1551.

Would that you also, my dear Lelio, would learn to regulate your powers with the same moderation! You have no reason to expect a reply from me so long as you bring forward those monstrous questions. If you are gratified by floating among those aerial speculations, permit me, I beseech you, an humble disciple of Christ, to meditate on those things which tend towards the building up of my faith. And indeed I shall hereafter follow out my wishes in silence, that you may not be troubled by me. And in truth, I am very greatly grieved that the fine talents with which God has endowed you, should be occupied not only with what is vain and fruitless, but that they should be also injured by pernicious figments. What I warned you of long ago, I must again seriously repeat, that unless you correct in time this itching after investigation, it is to be feared you will bring upon yourself severe suffering. I should be cruel towards you did I treat with a show of indulgence what I believe to be a very dangerous error. I should prefer, accordingly, offending you a little at present by my severity, rather than allow you to indulge unchecked in the fascinating allurements of curiosity. The time will come, I hope, when you will rejoice in having been so violently admonished.⁹⁸

The correspondence of Calvin also reveals his agitation over the teachings of Gribaldo. In a letter to the Count of Montbelliard on

May 2, 1557, Calvin stated:

⁹⁷Quoted by Wilbur, op. cit., p. 204.

⁹⁸Bonnet, op. cit., II, 330-31.

But it has also pleased you at the present moment to make some enquiries about Matteo Gribaldi, I shall briefly explain to you how he conducted himself here. . . . But as he was in the habit of coming here every year, it is possible he was among us at the time when Servetus was thrown into prison. And at that time dissembling his participation in the impious errors of that man, he contented himself with insinuating, in the conversations which he held, that punishments ought not to be inflicted on men for holding false opinions, for that every one should be allowed liberty of conscience. . . . When we saw that our man could not be appeased by friendly demonstrations, we decided, that being cited to appear in the council chamber he should give an account of his faith. There he not only shuffled, but showed evidently that he was unwilling to profess openly what were his real sentiments. After a short interval, however, some expressions escaped him from which we had no difficulty in concluding in what pernicious errors he had been entangled. When we counselled modestly, he showed by his vainglorious boasting, that nothing is more audacious than ignorance. Thus with such perverse obstinacy our pious and useful admonitions were of no avail. . . . As he betrayed by a writing in his own hand the kind of doctrine which we condemn in him, your highness will thence judge whether we ought to suffer the impious man who so perversely rends asunder the essence of God, and pretends that Christ is a newly invented divinity, different from the Father, and of a different essence from the Father. But as it is not my purpose at present to refute his impieties, lest the prolixity of my letter should tire out your patience, I conceived I should best discharge my duty, and in a manner most conformable to your sentiments, by sending to your highness the confession written and signed with his own hand, in which he attempts to exculpate himself to his Italian brethren. Whence the most illustrious prince your nephew will sufficiently, and more than sufficiently, perceive how profanely and wickedly this wretch saps and perverts the chief article of our faith.⁹⁹

Another item of evidence which reveals the alarm created by

⁹⁹Ibid., III, 326-28.

Gribaldo is a letter written by Calvin to Wolmar which warned of Gribaldo's heretical views.¹⁰⁰

The heretical confession of faith prepared by Gentile so upset Calvin that he and the Geneva ministers made a lengthy and rather bitter reply.¹⁰¹ Something of Calvin's attitude can be seen in his letter to the Marquis De Vico on July 19, 1558.

... but this did not last long, for Valentin, who is now in prison as false and disloyal, has kept in secret a kind of school for the propagation of his errors, which are on one point as detestable as those of Servetus, as, in fact, there is scarcely any difference between them. Since he has been handed over to justice, he has sufficiently demonstrated to all of us, that for pride, malice, hypocrisy, and obstinate impudence, he has his full share of them. At least he has not spared me, nor ceased to cover me with as many scurrilous outrages, as a man in despair can vomit forth; and that too, in writing. I know not what will be the issue of it, but the commencement greatly annoys me.¹⁰²

An extensive amount of material is available which reveals Calvin's concern over Servetus. The purpose of this study necessitates only a few representative examples. Calvin was so aroused by the implications of the teachings of Servetus that he wrote to Farel stating that if Servetus came to see him and if he had any authority, he would never let Servetus away alive.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰CO, XV, 644.

¹⁰¹CO, IX, 411.

¹⁰²Bonnet, op. cit., III, 443-44.

¹⁰³CO, XII, 283.

Servetus lately wrote to me, and coupled with his letter a long volume of his delirious fancies, with the Thrasonic boast, that I should see something astonishing and unheard of. He takes it upon him to come hither, if it be agreeable to me. But I am unwilling to pledge my word for his safety, for if he shall come, I shall never permit him to depart alive, provided my authority be of any avail. ¹⁰⁴

Servetus made insulting remarks on the margins of the pages of Calvin's books and then sent them to Calvin. Calvin said not a page was free from the vomit of Servetus. ¹⁰⁵ In the trial of Servetus, Calvin pointed out many heresies in the writings of Servetus. ¹⁰⁶ Calvin found thirty-eight statements in the books of Servetus which were wholly foreign to the Word of God. ¹⁰⁷ After the death of Servetus, Calvin wrote a defense of the death sentence and a refutation of the errors of Servetus. ¹⁰⁸ In this work Calvin made a plea for the right and duty of the Christian magistrates to punish heresy by death.

Much of Calvin's evidence is drawn from Jewish laws and the examples of kings of Israel. At this point some of the influence which the controversies with the heretics had on Calvin's use of the historical

¹⁰⁴Bonnet, op. cit., II, 33.

¹⁰⁵CO, VIII, 748, 481.

¹⁰⁶CO, VIII, 479.

¹⁰⁷CO, VIII, 501-08.

¹⁰⁸CO, VIII, 453-644.

principle of biblical exegesis can be seen.

Additional evidence that Calvin was greatly concerned with the rationalism and humanism of the heretics can be found in the Commentaries. An example of Calvin's attitude is clearly seen in his comments on Galatians 5:12.

But how can such an imprecation be reconciled with the mildness of an apostle, who ought to wish that all should be saved, and that not a single person should perish? So far as men are concerned, I admit the force of this argument; for it is the will of God that we should seek the salvation of all men without exception, as Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world. But devout minds are sometimes carried beyond the consideration of men, and led to fix their eye on the glory of God, and the kingdom of Christ. The glory of God, which is in itself more excellent than the salvation of men, ought to receive from us a higher degree of esteem and regard. Believers earnestly desirous that the glory of God should be promoted, forget men, and forget the world, and would rather choose that the whole world should perish, than that the smallest portion of the glory of God should be withdrawn.

Let us remember, however, that such a prayer as this proceeds from leaving men wholly out of view, and fixing our attention on God alone. Paul cannot be accused of cruelty, as if he were opposed to the law of love. Besides, if a single man or a few persons be brought into comparison, how immensely must the church preponderate! It is a cruel kind of mercy which prefers a single man to the whole church. On one side, I see the flock of God in danger; on the other, I see a wolf "seeking", like Satan, "whom he may devour." (1 Peter v. 8) Ought not my care of the church to swallow up all my thoughts, and lead me to desire that its salvation should be purchased by the destruction of the wolf? And yet I would not wish that a single individual should perish in the way; but my love of the church and my anxiety about her interests carry me away into a sort of ecstasy, so that I can think of nothing else. With such a zeal as this, every true pas-

tor of the church will burn. 109

Another example from the Commentaries of Calvin's conviction that the humanism and rationalism of the heretics was dangerous is found in his comments on Acts 13:10.

It was not without a cause that Paul was thus hot and angry; for he had no hope to do any good if he should deal after some moderate and mild sort. We must always begin with doctrine, and those are also to be admonished, exhorted, and pricked forward, who do not as yet appear to be altogether obstinate. Neither doth Paul so vehemently inveigh against the sorcerer at the first dash; but when he seeth him maliciously and manifestly fight against the doctrine of godliness, he handleth him like a bonds slave of Satan. Thus must we deal with the desperate enemies of the gospel, in whom appeareth open contumacy and wicked contempt of God, especially when they stop the way before others. And lest any man should think that Paul was out of measure angry, Luke saith plainly that the inspiration of the Spirit was his guide. Wherefore, this heat of zeal is not only not to be reprehended, but it ought to make the profane condemners of God sore afraid, who fear not to rebel against his word; forasmuch as this judgment is given upon them all not by mortal man, but by the Holy Ghost, by the mouth of Paul. . . . For we see with what sacrilegious boldness they despoil God of all honour; with what filthy corruptions they profane all religion; how cruelly they throw miserable souls headlong into eternal destruction; how unseemly they mock Christ; how filthily they disfigure all the whole worship of God; with what cruel reproaches they rend the holy truth of God; with what barbarous tyranny they lay waste the Church of God; so that you would say that they tread God under foot. And yet there be many crabbed philosophers who would have furious giants flattered and clawed by the back. But forasmuch as it doth evidently appear that such did never taste what that meaneth, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten up," (Psalm lxxix. 9,) let us, bidding adieu to their coldness, or rather sluggishness, be

most hot, as becometh us, in maintaining the glory of God.¹¹⁰

John Calvin was engaged in many controversies with the heretics over their rationalism and humanism and the relation of these attitudes to the problem of religious authority. There is evidence that these controversies affected his utilization of the historical principle of biblical exegesis.

5. Increased emphasis on the Canon, historical background of the Bible and biblical books, and chronology of the books of the Bible caused by the necessity of combating the Roman Catholic utilization of Apocrypha and tradition and the emphasis of the radical sects on private revelations.

Looking at Calvin's writings as a whole, he appears to have solved the problem of the canon by his principle of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. Warfield¹¹¹ contends, however, that Calvin constructed the canon on historico-critical grounds and then sought to see if the Holy Spirit approved. An amplification of this idea by Warfield affirms that Calvin solved the problem of the canon on the basis of

¹¹⁰Com. Acts 13:10.

¹¹¹B. B. Warfield, Calvin and Calvinism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), p. 92.

"scientific investigation, and appealed to the testimony of the Spirit only to accredit the divine origin of the concrete volume thus put into his hands."¹¹² Warfield¹¹³ admits, however, that such ardent Calvinists as Pannier, Reuss, and Leipoldt disagree with him on this problem.

Despite Warfield's arguments it would seem that the inner witness of the Spirit answered the general problem of the canon for Calvin and gave him the canon of sixty-six traditional books. In the Institutes Calvin clarified this position.

As to the question, How shall we be persuaded that it came from God without recurring to a decree of the Church? It is just the same as if it were asked, How shall we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter? Scripture bears upon the face of it clear evidence of its truth, as white and black do of their colour, sweet and bitter of their taste.¹¹⁴

This same position is accentuated by Calvin in another statement in the Institutes.

Let it therefore be held as fixed, that those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture; that Scripture, carrying its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments, but owes the full conviction with

¹¹²Ibid., p. 101.

¹¹³Loc. cit.

¹¹⁴I, vii, 5.

which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit.¹¹⁵

In discussing II Maccabees, Calvin pointed out that whoever it was that wrote the book expressed a wish that he may have written well, but if not, he asks pardon. Calvin exclaimed, "How very alien this acknowledgment from the majesty of the Holy Spirit!"¹¹⁶ This is in keeping with Doumergue's appraisal of the teaching of Calvin. For Calvin

. . . the divinity of the Bible is directly sensible to the heart of the faithful; certainty is immediate and divine, the most certain of certainties and the only sufficient one; in a word, the testimony of the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁷

There is found in Calvin's writings, however, a somewhat paradoxical attitude toward the canon. In writings other than the Institutes, Calvin often met objections to the validity of certain books of the Bible on the merits of the specific individual books. In this way Calvin dealt with the canonical problems of such books as Hebrews, James, and II Peter. He expressed concern over the book of Revelation. John Bodin gives us Calvin's attitude toward the book of Revelation.

¹¹⁵₁, vii, 5.

¹¹⁶ Calvin's Tracts, III, 70-71.

¹¹⁷ Doumergue, Jean Calvin, les hommes et les choses de son temps, op. cit. (1910), IV, 59.

I thoroughly approve of the reply of Calvin, not less polished than sagacious, when he was asked his opinion about the book of the Apocalypse. He candidly answered that he was totally at a loss regarding the meaning of this obscure writer, whose identity was not agreed upon among the erudite.¹¹⁸

Regardless of whether the historico-critical study of the individual books of the canon or the inner witness of the Spirit came first, it is true that Calvin utilized the historical principle of exegesis in considering the historical background and merit of individual books. Evidence of this is seen in such writings of Calvin as the Argument of his commentary on Hebrews and in the Argument of his commentary on James. A representative example of his emphasis is found in his discussion of II Peter.

What Jerome writes influences me somewhat more, that some, induced by a difference in style, did not think that Peter was the author. For though some affinity may be traced, yet I confess that there is that manifest difference which distinguishes different writers. There are also other probable conjectures by which we may conclude that it was written by another rather than by Peter. At the same time, according to the consent of all, it has nothing unworthy of Peter, as it shows everywhere the power and the grace of an apostolic spirit. If it be received as canonical, we must allow Peter to be the author, since it has his name inscribed, and he also testifies that he had lived with Christ; and it would have been a fiction unworthy of a minister of Christ, to have impersonated another individual. So then I conclude, that if the Epistle be deemed worthy of credit, it must have proceeded

¹¹⁸John Bodin, Method for the Easy Comprehension of History, trans. by Beatrice Reynolds (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), p. 291.

from Peter; not that he himself wrote it, but that some one of his disciples set forth in writing, by his command, those things which the necessity of the times required. For it is probable that he was now in extreme old age, for he says, that he was near his end. And it may have been that at the request of the godly, he allowed this testimony of his mind to be recorded shortly before his death, because it might have somewhat availed, when he was dead, to support the good, and to repress the wicked. Doubtless, as in every part of the Epistle the majesty of the Spirit of Christ appears, to repudiate it is what I dread, though I do not here recognize the language of Peter. But since it is not quite evident as to the author, I shall allow myself the liberty of using the word Peter or Apostle indiscriminately. ¹¹⁹

Differences in individual style and the fact that the biblical authors wrote in historical settings were recognized by Calvin. An example of this is found in his comments on Psalm 19:4.

Hitherto have I explained the true and proper meaning of the inspired writer. Some have wrested this part of the psalm by putting upon it an allegorical interpretation; but my readers will easily perceive that this has been done without reason. I have shown in the commencement, and it is also evident from the scope of the whole discourse, that David, before coming to the law, sets before us the fabric of the world, that in it we might behold the glory of God. Now, if we understand the heavens as meaning the apostles, and the sun Christ, there will be no longer place for the division of which we have spoken; and, besides, it would be an improper arrangement to place the gospel first and then the law. It is very evident that the inspired poet here treats of the knowledge of God, which is naturally presented to all men in this world as in a mirror; and, therefore, I forbear discoursing longer on that point. As, however, these allegorical interpreters have supported their views from the words of Paul, this difficulty must be removed. Paul, in discoursing upon the calling of the Gentiles, lays down this as an established principle, that, "Who-

¹¹⁹ Com. II Pet. "The Argument."

ever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved;" and then he adds, that it is impossible for any to call upon him until they know him by the teaching of the gospel. But as it seemed to the Jews to be a kind of sacrilege that Paul published the promise of salvation to the Gentiles, he asks whether the Gentiles themselves had not heard? And he answers, by quoting this passage, that there was a school open and accessible to them, in which they might learn to fear God, and serve him, inasmuch as "the writing of the heavens has gone forth through all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world," (Rom. x. 18.) But Paul could not at that time have said with truth, that the voice of the gospel had been heard through the whole world from the mouth of the apostles, since it had scarcely as yet reached even a few countries. The preaching of the other apostles certainly had not then extended to far distant parts of the world, but was confined within the boundaries of Judea. The design of the apostle it is not difficult to comprehend. He intended to say that God, from ancient times, had manifested his glory to the Gentiles, and that this was a prelude to the more ample instructions which was one day to be published to them. And although God's chosen people for a time had been in a condition distinct and separate from that of the Gentiles, it ought not to be thought strange that God at length made himself known indiscriminately to both, seeing he had hitherto united them to himself by certain means which addressed themselves in common to both; as Paul says in another passage, that when God, "in times past, suffered all nations to walk in their own ways, he nevertheless left not himself without a witness," (Acts xiv. 16, 17.) Whence we conclude, that those who have imagined that Paul departed from the genuine and proper sense of David's words are grossly mistaken. The reader will understand this still more clearly by reading my commentaries on the above passage of St. Paul. 120

Another illustration of the attention which Calvin gave to historical background is found in his comment on Ephesians 4:8.

The Jews go still farther, and, for the sake of giving to their

accusations a greater air of plausibility, maliciously pervert the natural meaning of this passage. What is said of God, is applied by them to David or to the people. "David, or the people," they say, "ascended on high, when, in consequence of many victories, they rose superior to their enemies." But a careful examination of the Psalm will convince any reader that the words, he ascended up on high, are applied strictly to God alone.

The whole Psalm may be regarded as an ἐκινίκιον, a song of triumph, which David sings to God on account of the victories which he had obtained; but, taking occasion from the narrative of his own exploits, he makes a passing survey of the astonishing deliverances which the Lord had formerly wrought for his people. His object is to show, that we ought to contemplate in the history of the Church the glorious power and goodness of God; and among other things he says, Thou hast ascended on high. (Ps. lxxviii. 18.) . . .

Perceiving that it is a song of triumph, in which David celebrates all the victories which God had wrought for the salvation of his Church, Paul very properly quoted the account given of God's ascension, and applied it to the person of Christ. The noblest triumph which God ever gained was when Christ, after subduing sin, conquering death, and putting Satan to flight, rose majestically to heaven, that he might exercise his glorious reign over the Church. Hitherto there is no ground for the objection, that Paul has applied this quotation in a manner inconsistent with the design of the Psalmist. The continued existence of the Church is represented by David to be a manifestation of the Divine glory. But no ascension of God more triumphant or memorable will ever occur, than that which took place when Christ was carried up to the right hand of the Father, that he might rule over all authorities and powers, and might become the everlasting guardian and protector of his people. ¹²¹

Although it is subordinate to the inner witness of the Spirit, the place of argument, observation, and discussion was recognized

¹²¹ Com. Eph. 4:8.

by Calvin in relation to the various biblical books. He recognized that after one has once received the Scripture religiously, "proofs . . . become most appropriate helps."¹²² In the remainder of chapter 8 of the first book of the Institutes Calvin listed such secondary helps as the antiquity of the books of Moses, the public attestation of miracles, fulfilled prophecies, preservation of the books as intact, harmony of the evangelists, the conversion of Paul, and the proof of church history. Although these arguments are helpful, they do not compare with developments in modern historical method and historical criticism of the Scripture. It is also obvious that some of the chronology and historical material is outmoded. The main concern in this study, however, is with the fact that the Roman Catholic utilization of the Apocrypha and tradition accentuated Calvin's emphasis on the validity of the canon and the historical background of the books of the Bible. And let it be remembered that attention to the canon and the historical background of the biblical books is an aspect of the historical principle of biblical exegesis. It might be added that the modern insistence on the fact that Christianity is a historical religion and closely bound to its documents owes not a little to Calvin.¹²³

¹²²₁, viii, 1.

¹²³_A. Dakin, Calvinism (London: Duckworth, 1940), pp.

It is evident that Calvin was answering the radical sects, with their emphasis on the New Testament to the neglect of the Old Testament, in his comments on Romans 15:4.

This is an interesting passage, by which we understand that there is nothing vain and unprofitable contained in the oracles of God; and we are at the same time taught that it is by the reading of the Scripture that we make progress in piety and holiness of life. Whatever then is delivered in Scripture we ought to strive to learn; for it were a reproach offered to the Holy Spirit to think, that he has taught anything which it does not concern us to know; let us also know, that whatever is taught us conduces to the advancement of religion. And though he speaks of the Old Testament, the same thing is also true of the writings of the Apostles; for since the Spirit of Christ is everywhere like itself, there is no doubt but that he has adapted his teaching by the Apostles, as formerly by the Prophets, to the edification of his people. Moreover, we find here a most striking condemnation of those fanatics who vaunt that the Old Testament is abolished, and that it belongs not in any degree to Christians; for with what front can they turn away Christians from those things which, as Paul testifies, have been appointed by God for their salvation? ¹²⁴

Another example of Calvin's concern over the fact that some of the radical sects disregarded the Old Testament is found in his comment on Luke 24:27.

This passage shows us in what manner Christ is made known to us through the Gospel. It is when light is thrown on the knowledge of him by the Law and the Prophets. For never was there a more able or skilful teacher of the Gospel than our Lord himself; and we see that he borrows from the Law and the Prophets the proof of his doctrine. If it be objected that he began with easy lessons, that the disciples might gradually dismiss the Prophets,

¹²⁴Com. Rom. 15:4.

and pass on to the perfect Gospel, this conjecture is easily refuted; for we shall afterwards find it stated, that all the apostles had their understanding opened, not to be wise without the assistance of the Law, but to understand the Scriptures. In order that Christ may be made known to us through the Gospel, it is therefore necessary that Moses and the Prophets should go before as guides, to show us the way. It is necessary to remind readers of this, that they may not lend an ear to fanatics, who, by suppressing the Law and the Prophets, wickedly mutilate the Gospel; as if God intended that any testimony which he has ever given respecting his Son should become useless. 125

Perhaps an even stronger emphasis on the importance of the Old Testament is found in Calvin's comment on II Peter 1:19.

In short, Peter reminds us that as long as we sojourn in this world, we have need of the doctrine of the prophets as a guiding light; which being extinguished, we can do nothing else but wander in darkness; for he does not disjoin the prophecies from the gospel, when he teaches us that they shine to show us the way. His object only was to teach us that the whole course of our life ought to be guided by God's word; for otherwise we must be involved on every side in the darkness of ignorance; and the Lord does not shine on us, except when we take his word as our light. 126

Calvin always sought to explain any text which might minimize the validity of the biblical books and furnish a basis for the radical sects to defend their doctrine of private revelations. He explained I Corinthians 7:40 in this way.

As to what he adds--according to my judgment, he does not mean by this expression that his opinion was doubtful; but it is as

125 Com. Luke 24:27.

126 Com. II Pet. 1:19.

if he had said that such was his decision as to this question; for he immediately adds that he has the Spirit of God, which is sufficient to give full and perfect authority. There appears, at the same time, to be somewhat of irony when he says I think. For as the false apostles were ever and anon boasting in high-sounding terms of their having the Spirit of God, for the purpose of arrogating to themselves authority, and in the meantime endeavoured to derogate from that of Paul, he says that he thinks that he is not less a partaker of the Spirit than they.¹²⁷

The apocalyptic sects tended to minimize the historical background of the Bible. Visser 't Hooft¹²⁸ points out that Calvin's reaction to this emphasis of apocalyptic sects was so great that he became overcautious in dealing with the problem of eschatology and the book of Revelation. Bainton¹²⁹ also emphasizes this fact.

In many of his writings Calvin was careful to point out that Scripture is prior to the church. The doctrines which the church through its pastors and doctors teaches are derived entirely from the Word of God--the church has no power to add to them.¹³⁰ This idea was amplified by Calvin when he stated that no one can obtain true doc-

¹²⁷Com. I Cor. 7:40.

¹²⁸W. A. Visser 't Hooft, The Kingship of Christ (New York: Harper and Bros., 1948), pp. 19-20.

¹²⁹Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952), pp. 114-15.

¹³⁰IV. viii. 8-9.

trine except from the Scriptures.¹³¹ Furthermore, nothing needful is omitted in the Scriptures.¹³² In commenting on II Peter 1:20, Calvin affirmed that anything men bring into the realm of religious authority apart from the Scripture is profane.

. . . only are the prophecies read profitably, when we renounce the mind and feelings of the flesh, and submit to the teaching of the Spirit, but that it is an impious profanation of it, when we arrogantly rely on our own acumen, deeming that sufficient to enable us to understand it, though the mysteries contain things hidden to our flesh, and sublime treasures of life far surpassing our capacities. And this is what we have said, that the light which shines in it, comes to the humble alone.

But the Papists are doubly foolish, when they conclude from this passage, that no interpretation of a private man ought to be deemed authoritative. For they pervert what Peter says, that they may claim for their own councils the chief right of interpreting Scripture; but in this they act indeed childishly; for Peter calls interpretation private, not that of every individual, in order to prohibit each one to interpret; but he shows that whatever men bring of their own is profane. Were, then, the whole world unanimous, and were the minds of all men united together, still what would proceed from them, would be private or their own; for the word is here set in opposition to divine revelation . . .¹³³

Another illustration of Calvin's emphasis on the sole authority of the Scriptures and his rejection of tradition, is found in his comments on II Peter 1:19.

¹³¹I, vi, 1-2.

¹³²III, xxi, 3.

¹³³Com. II Pet. 1:20.

The Papists have ever and anon in their mouth, that the Church cannot err. Though the word is neglected, they yet imagine that it is guided by the Spirit. But Peter, on the contrary, intimates that all are immersed in darkness who do not attend to the light of the word. Therefore, except thou art resolved willingly to cast thyself into a labyrinth, especially beware of departing even in the least thing from the rule and direction of the word. Nay, the Church cannot follow God as its guide, except it observes what the word prescribes. ¹³⁴

Still another illustration of Calvin's conviction that papal tradition and private revelations are worthless, is seen in his discussion of

I Peter 1:25.

What, then, is this word of the Lord, which gives us life? Even the Law, the Prophets, the Gospel. Those who wander beyond these limits of revelation, find nothing but the impostures of Satan and his dotages, and not the word of the Lord. We ought the more carefully to notice this, because impious and Luciferian men, craftily allowing to God's word its own honour, at the same time, attempt to draw us away from the Scriptures, as that unprincipled man, Agrippa, who highly extols the eternity of God's word, and yet treats with scurrility the Prophets, and thus indirectly laughs to scorn the Word of God.

In short, as I have already reminded you, no mention is here made of the word which lies hid in the bosom of God, but of that which has proceeded from his mouth, and has come to us. So again it ought to be borne in mind, that God designed by the Apostles and Prophets to speak to us, and their mouths is the mouth of the only true God. ¹³⁵

Calvin's disdain of papal tradition and emphasis on the priority of the

Scripture are further seen in his interesting comment on Acts 17:11.

¹³⁴Com. II Pet. 1:19.

¹³⁵Com. I Pet. 1:25.

Unto the first objection I answer, that Luke's words ought not so to be understood, as if the Thessalonians took upon them to judge, or as though they disputed whether the truth of God were to be received; they did only examine Paul's doctrine by the rule and square of the Scripture, even as gold is tried in the fire; for the Scripture is the true touchstone whereby all doctrines must be tried. If any man say that this kind of trial is doubtful, forasmuch as the Scripture is oftentimes doubtful, and is interpreted in divers ways, I say, that we must also add the judgment of the Spirit, who is, not without cause, called the Spirit of discretion, (discernment.) But the faithful must judge of every doctrine not otherwise than out of, and according to, the Scriptures, having the Spirit for their leader and guide. And by this means is refuted that sacrilegious quip (quibble) of the Papists, because there can be nothing gathered certainly out of the Scriptures, faith doth depend only upon the determination of the Church. For when the Spirit of God doth commend the men of Thessalonica, he prescribeth to us a rule in their example. And in vain should we search the Scriptures, unless they have in them light enough to teach us.

Therefore, let this remain as a most sure maxim, that no doctrine is worthy to be believed but that which we find to be grounded in the Scriptures. The Pope will have all that received without any more ado, whatsoever he doth blunder out at his pleasure; but shall he be preferred before Paul, concerning whose preaching it was lawful for the disciples to make inquisition? And let us note that this is not spoken of any visured (pretended) Council, but of a small assembly of men, whereby it doth appear that every man is called to read the Scripture. So likewise, making of search doth not disagree with the forwardness of faith; for so soon as any man doth hearken, and being desirous to learn, doth show himself attentive, he is now bent and apt to be taught, though he does not fully give his consent. For example's sake, an unknown teacher shall profess that he doth bring true doctrine; I will come, being ready to hear, and my mind shall be framed unto the obedience of the truth. Nevertheless, I will weigh with myself what manner (of) doctrine it is which he bringeth; neither will I embrace anything but the certain truth, and that which I know to be the truth. And this is the best moderation, when, being fast bound with the reverence of God, we hear that willingly and quietly which is set before us, as proceeding from him. Nevertheless,

we beware of the seducing subtilty of men; neither do our minds throw themselves headlong with a blind rage to believe every thing without advisement. Therefore, the searching mentioned by Luke doth not tend to that end that we may be slow and unwilling to believe, but rather readiness with judgment is made the mean between lightness and stubbornness. 136

Attempting to explain any text which would allow room for papal tradition, Calvin has a trenchant discussion of tradition in his exegesis of I Corinthians 7:25.

He says that he gives advice, not as if there were anything doubtful in it, and that it had little or no stability, but as being certain, and deserving to be maintained without any controversy. The word, too, that he employs, *γνώμη*, signifies not merely advice, but a decisive judgment. Papists, however, rashly infer from this, that it is allowable to go beyond the limits of God's word, since nothing was farther from Paul's intentions than to go beyond the limits of God's word: for if any one attends more closely, he will see, that Paul here advances nothing but what is included in what Christ says in Matt. v. 32, and xix. 5; but in the way of anticipating an objection, he acknowledges that he has no express precept in the law, pointing out who ought to marry, and who not.

Having obtained mercy to be faithful. He secures authority for his decision, that no one may think himself at liberty to reject it, if he chooses. For he declares that he does not speak simply as a man, but as a faithful teacher of the Church, and an Apostle of Christ. According to his custom, he declares himself to be indebted for this to the mercy of God, as it was no common honour, nay superior to all human merits. Hence it appears, that whatever things have been introduced into the Church by human authority, have nothing in common with this advice of Paul. But faithful here means truthful--one who does not do what he does merely from pious zeal, but is also endowed with knowledge,

so as to teach with purity and faithfulness. For it is not enough for a teacher to be conscientious, if he has not also prudence and acquaintance with the truth.¹³⁷

If it had not been for the Roman Catholic attempt to utilize the Apocrypha of the Old Testament and tradition, plus the emphasis of the radical sects on private revelations, Calvin probably would not have emphasized the canon, the priority of Scripture, the historical background of the biblical books, and the chronology of the biblical books as much as he did. Thus it is seen that Calvin's controversies tended to cause him to give more attention to some aspects of the historical principle of biblical exegesis than would have been the case under different historical conditions.

6. Increased emphasis on the historical inerrancy, infallibility, and finality of the contents of the Bible caused by the necessity of combating the Roman Catholics, heretics, and radical sects.

In opposing both tradition and private revelations, Calvin was driven to put an increasing amount of emphasis on the historical inerrancy, infallibility, and finality of the contents of the Bible. There is a dispute among scholars as to the extent of Calvin's emphasis on the literal inspiration of the Bible. It is not necessary for the purposes

¹³⁷Com. I Cor. 7:25.

of this paper to seek to resolve this controversy over whether or not Calvin held a mechanical (literal) dictation theory of the inspiration of the Bible.

Dowey¹³⁸ contends that Calvin held the literal or dictation view of inspiration. To substantiate his viewpoint, Dowey cites Calvin's comments on Jeremiah 36:4-6. In this passage Calvin is apparently describing the actual mechanics of inspiration.

Here the Prophet declares that he dictated to Baruch, a servant of God, whatever he had previously taught. But there is no doubt but that God suggested to the Prophet at the time what might have been erased from his memory; for all the things which we have some time ago said, do not always occur to us. Therefore the greater part of so many words must have escaped the Prophet, had not God dictated them again to him. Jeremiah then stood, as it were, between God and Baruch; for God, by his Spirit, presided over and guided the mind and tongue of the Prophet. Now the Prophet, the Spirit being his guide and teacher, recited what God had commanded; and Baruch wrote down, and then proclaimed the whole summary of what the Prophet had taught. He therefore, says that he called to him Baruch the son of Neria, who wrote from his mouth, and he wrote all the words of Jehovah. Jeremiah repeats again that nothing came from himself. We hence see that he did not dictate, according to his own will, what came to his mind, but that God suggested whatever he wished to be written by Baruch.¹³⁹

A similar statement is found in Calvin's discussion of Jeremiah 36:8.

So also the words which God dictated to his servant were

¹³⁸Edward Dowey, Jr., The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 99.

¹³⁹Com. Jer. 36:4-6.

called the words of Jeremiah; yet, properly speaking, they were not the words of man, for they did not proceed from a mortal man, but from the only true God. ¹⁴⁰

The Scripture narrative states that Jehoiakim burned the roll which Jeremiah had dictated to Baruch. Calvin gives an account of the replacement of this roll in his discussion of Jeremiah 36:28.

The first thing is, that the Prophet was bidden to write another roll, after the King Jehoiakim vented his rage against the roll read before him; and hence he carefully repeats the words, Take to thee another roll, and write in it the same words which were in the first book; as though he had said, "Let not a syllable be omitted, but let that which I once proclaimed by thy mouth, remain unchanged; and let thus all the ungodly know that thou hast faithfully delivered what thou didst receive from my mouth. ¹⁴¹

Thus, on evidence such as this which has been quoted from the comments on Jeremiah, Doney affirms that Calvin held that the original text of the Bible contained no errors. ¹⁴² In agreement with Doney's general viewpoint are R. Seeburg, ¹⁴³ O. Ritschl, ¹⁴⁴ and A. M. Hunter. ¹⁴⁵ Calvin's comments on II Timothy 3:16 seem to support those

¹⁴⁰Com. Jer. 36:8.

¹⁴¹Com. Jer. 36:28.

¹⁴²Doney, op. cit., p. 100.

¹⁴³Reinhold Seeberg, Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte (second edition; Erlangen: 1920), IV (part 2), 566-69.

¹⁴⁴Otto Ritschl, Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus (Göttingen: 1926), III, 63 f.

¹⁴⁵A. Mitchell Hunter, The Teaching of Calvin (second edition, revised; London: James Clarke and Co., 1950), pp. 72-78.

who hold the view that Calvin believed in the literal inspiration of the Bible.

Moses and the prophets did not utter at random what we have received from their hand, but, speaking at the suggestion of God, they boldly and fearlessly testified, what was actually true, that it was the mouth of the Lord that spake.¹⁴⁶

Even stronger is Calvin's statement in his commentary on Acts 1:16.

Such manner of speeches bring greater reverence to the Scriptures, whilst we are taught by them that David and all the rest of the prophets did speak only as they were directed by the Holy Ghost; so that they themselves were not the authors of their prophecies, but the Spirit which used their tongues as an instrument.¹⁴⁷

There are other scholars who contend that Calvin held a dynamic view of inspiration. J. Pannier affirms, "Calvin has not written one word that a person can invoke in favor of literal inspiration."¹⁴⁸ Henri Clavier,¹⁴⁹ in a careful study of Calvin's biblicism, finds a distinction between the Word and the Scripture. Doumergue¹⁵⁰ insists that

¹⁴⁶Com. II Tim. 3:16.

¹⁴⁷Com. Acts 1:16.

¹⁴⁸Jacques Pannier, Le Témoignage du Saint-Esprit (Paris: 1893), p. 200.

¹⁴⁹Henri Clavier, Études sur le Calvinisme (Paris: Fischbacher, 1936), p. 108.

¹⁵⁰Doumergue, Jean Calvin, les hommes et les choses de son temps, op. cit., IV, 72-74.

the statement that the Scripture "is given to us from the very mouth of God"¹⁵¹ should be interpreted in the light of such illuminating remarks as this: "Prophets and pastors are in the church of God as the very mouth of God."¹⁵² It seems possible to apply the term "mouth of God" to Old Testament priests and to all pastors, as well as to the special instruments of inspiration. Doumergue further contends that the term "dictate" is changed to "inspire" in certain instances in the original French translations.¹⁵³ Thus Clavier and Doumergue insist that for Calvin the doctrine, rather than the words, is most frequently described as inspired.¹⁵⁴ Others insist that Calvin's oft-quoted designation of the apostles as "authentic amanuenses of the Holy Spirit,"¹⁵⁵ and his statement that Scripture is "given to us by the very mouth of God"¹⁵⁶ must be read in the light of Calvin's commentaries, which do

¹⁵¹I, vii, 5.

¹⁵²Homilies on I Sam. 4:2. CO, XXIX, 705.

¹⁵³Doumergue, Jean Calvin, les hommes et les choses de son temps, op. cit., IV, 72-74.

¹⁵⁴Clavier, op. cit., pp. 27, 81-84, 110 f. and Doumergue, Jean Calvin, les hommes et les choses de son temps, op. cit., IV, 78 f.

¹⁵⁵IV, viii, 9.

¹⁵⁶I, vii, 5.

not show the verbal infallibility which these words seem to imply.

Warfield has an interesting solution to the problem of Calvin's view of inspiration.

It is not unfair to urge, however, that this language is figurative; and that what Calvin has in mind is not to insist that the mode of inspiration was dictation, but that the result of inspiration is as if it were by dictation, viz., the production of a pure word of God free from all human admixtures. The term "dictation" was no doubt in current use at the time to express rather the effects than the mode of inspiration.¹⁵⁷

Whatever the exact answer to the controversial problem of Calvin's doctrine of inspiration, it can be said that his conflicts with the Roman Catholics, heretics, and radical sects tended to cause him to emphasize the fact that the original series of biblical documents were errorless in the form in which they were written by the prophets and apostles.

In order to substantiate the inerrancy and infallibility of the contents of the Bible, Calvin's exegesis was filled with a great deal of harmonizing, explaining, and interpreting of passages which on the surface appear to be contradictory or inaccurate.

Some of the difficulties were explained by blaming them on an incompetent or ignorant copyist. In commenting on a seeming mistake in Acts 7:14, Calvin used this method.

¹⁵⁷Warfield, Calvin and Calvinism, op. cit., pp. 63-65.

Whereas he saith that Jacob came into Egypt with seventy-five souls, it agreeth not with the words of Moses; for Moses maketh mention of seventy only. Jerome thinketh that Luke setteth not down, word for word, those things which Stephen had spoken, or that he took this number out of the Greek translation of Moses, (Gen. xli. 27,) either because he himself, being a proselyte, had not the knowledge of the Hebrew tongue, or because he would grant the Gentiles this, who used to read it thus. . . . Therefore, I think that this difference came through the error of the writers which wrote out of the books. ¹⁵⁸

Another example of Calvin's explanation of an apparent inaccuracy by ascribing the error to a copyist is found in his discussion of Matthew 1:6.

Comparing the inspired history with the succession described by Matthew, it is evident that he has omitted three kings. Those who say that he did so through forgetfulness, cannot be listened to for a moment. Nor is it probable that they were thrown out, because they were unworthy to occupy a place in the genealogy of Christ; for the same reason would equally apply to many others, who are indiscriminately brought forward by Matthew, along with pious and holy persons. A more correct account is, that he resolved to confine the list of each class to fourteen kings, and gave himself little concern in making the selection, because he had an adequate succession of the genealogy to place before the eyes of his readers, down to the close of the kingdom. As to there being only thirteen in the list, it probably arose from the blunders and carelessness of transcribers. Epiphanius, in his First Book against Heresies, assigns this reason, that the name of Jeconiah had been twice put down, and unlearned persons ventured to strike out the repetition of it as superfluous; which, he tells us, ought not to have been done, because Jehoiakim, the father of King Jehoiakim, had the name Jeconiah in common with his son, (1 Chron. iii, 17; 2 Kings xxiv. 15; Jer. xxvii. 20; xxviii. 4.) Robert Stephens quotes a Greek manuscript, in which the name of Je-

¹⁵⁸ Com. Acts 7:14.

hoiakim is introduced.¹⁵⁹

One of Calvin's most frequently used methods to maintain the inerrancy, infallibility, and finality of the contents of the Bible is the principle of accommodation. Calvin oftentimes represented Bible writers as accommodating their messages to the mental capacities of their original readers. In this way the principle of accommodation is used by Calvin to explain away irregularities that might otherwise be simply accepted as inaccuracies. Examples of such an approach could be multiplied. A few representative illustrations will suffice for the purposes of this study. In a discussion of Matthew 5:1, Calvin observed:

Matthew takes no notice of the time, but only mentions the place. It is probable, that this discourse was not delivered until Christ had chosen the twelve: but in attending to the order of time, which I saw that the Spirit of God had disregarded, I did not wish to be too precise. Pious and modest readers ought to be satisfied with having a brief summary of the doctrine of Christ placed before their eyes, collected out of his many and various discourses, the first of which was that in which he spoke to his disciples about true happiness.¹⁶⁰

Another example is found in Calvin's attempt to explain an apparent error in Matthew 2:6.

The scribes quoted faithfully, no doubt, the words of the pas-

¹⁵⁹Com. Matt. 1:6.

¹⁶⁰Com. Matt. 5:1.

sage in their own language, as it is found in the prophet. But Matthew reckoned it enough to point out the passage; and, as he wrote in Greek, he followed the ordinary reading. This passage, and others of the same kind, readily suggest the inference, that Matthew did not compose his Gospel in the Hebrew language. It ought always to be observed that, whenever any proof from Scripture is quoted by the apostles, though they do not translate word for word, and sometimes depart widely from the language, yet it is applied correctly and appropriately to their subject. Let the reader always consider the purpose for which passages of Scripture are brought forward by the Evangelists, so as not to stick too closely to the particular words, but to be satisfied in this, that the Evangelists never torture Scripture into a different meaning, but apply it correctly in its native meaning. . . . It was their intention to supply with milk children and "novices" (1 Tim. iii. 6.) in faith, who were not yet able to endure "strong meat" (Heb. v. 12.) . . . 161

An excellent illustration of Calvin's use of the principle of accommo-

dation is seen in his discussion of the Genesis account of creation. A difficulty appeared in Genesis 1:7: "And God . . . divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so." The difficulty found in this verse is explained by the use of the principle of accommodation.

For it appears opposed to common sense, and quite incredible, that there should be waters above the heaven. Hence some resort to allegory, and philosophize concerning angels; but quite beside the purpose. For, to my mind, this is a certain principle, that nothing is here treated of but the visible form of the world. He who would learn astronomy, and other recondite arts, let him go elsewhere. Here the Spirit of God would teach all men without exception; and therefore what Gregory declares falsely and in

161 Com. Matt. 2:6.

vain respecting statues and pictures is truly applicable to the history of the creation, namely, that it is the book of the unlearned. The things, therefore, which he relates, serve as the garniture of that theatre which he places before our eyes. Whence I conclude, that the waters here meant are such as the rude and unlearned may perceive. The assertion of some, that they embrace by faith what they have read concerning the waters above the heavens, notwithstanding their ignorance respecting them, is not in accordance with the design of Moses.¹⁶²

In commenting on Genesis 1:14, Calvin stated:

It must be remembered, that Moses does not speak with philosophical acuteness on occult mysteries, but relates those things which are everywhere observed, even by the uncultivated, and which are in common use.¹⁶³

An even more striking illustration of his use of the principle of accommodation is found in Calvin's exegesis of Genesis 1:15.

It is well again to repeat what I have said before, that it is not here philosophically discussed, how great the sun is in the heaven, and how great, or how little, is the moon; but how much light comes to us from them. For Moses here addresses himself to our senses, that the knowledge of the gifts of God which we enjoy may not glide away. Therefore, in order to apprehend the meaning of Moses, it is to no purpose to soar above the heavens; let us only open our eyes to behold this light which God enkindles for us in the earth. By this method (as I have before observed) the dishonesty of those men is sufficiently rebuked, who censure Moses for not speaking with greater exactness. For as it became a theologian, he had respect to us rather than to the stars. Nor, in truth, was he ignorant of the fact, that the moon had not sufficient brightness to enlighten the earth, unless it borrowed from the sun; but he deemed it enough to declare what we all may plainly perceive, that the moon is a dispenser of light to us. That it is, as the astronomers assert, an opaque body, I allow to be

¹⁶²Com. Gen. 1:6-8.

¹⁶³Com. Gen. 1:14.

true, while I deny it to be a dark body. For, first, since it is placed above the element of fire, it must of necessity be a fiery body. Hence it follows, that it is also luminous; but seeing that it has not light sufficient to penetrate to us, it borrows what is wanting from the sun. He calls it a "lesser light" by comparison; because the portion of light which it emits to us is small compared with the infinite splendour of the sun.¹⁶⁴

To illustrate further Calvin's use of the principle of accommodation, consideration will be given to his exegesis of Genesis 1:16.

I have said, that Moses does not here subtlyly descant, as a philosopher, on the secrets of nature, as may be seen in these words. First, he assigns a place in the expanse of heaven to the planets and stars; but astronomers make a distinction of spheres, and, at the same time, teach that the fixed stars have their proper place in the firmament. Moses makes two great luminaries; but astronomers prove, by conclusive reasons, that the star of Saturn, which, on account of its great distance, appears the least of all, is greater than the moon. Here lies the difference; Moses wrote in a popular style things which, without instruction, all ordinary persons endued with common sense, are able to understand; but astronomers investigate with great labour whatever the sagacity of the human mind can comprehend. Nevertheless this study is not to be reprobated, nor this science to be condemned, because some frantic persons are wont boldly to reject whatever is unknown to them. For astronomy is not only pleasant, but also very useful to be known; it cannot be denied that this art unfolds the admirable wisdom of God. Wherefore, as ingenious men are to be honoured who have expended useful labour on this subject, so they who have leisure and capacity ought not to neglect this kind of exercise. Nor did Moses truly wish to withdraw us from this pursuit in omitting such things as are peculiar to the art; but because he was ordained a teacher as well of the unlearned and rude as of the learned, he could not otherwise fulfil his office than by descending to this grosser method of instruction. Had he spoken of things generally unknown, the uneducated might have pleaded in excuse that such subjects were beyond their

¹⁶⁴Com. Gen. 1:15.

capacity. Lastly, since the Spirit of God here opens a common school for all, it is not surprising that he should chiefly choose those subjects which would be intelligible to all. If the astronomer inquires respecting the actual dimensions of the stars, he will find the moon to be less than Saturn; but this is something abstruse, for to the sight it appears differently. Moses, therefore, rather adapts his discourse to common usage. For since the Lord stretches forth, as it were, his hand to us in causing us to enjoy the brightness of the sun and moon, how great would be our ingratitude were we to close our eyes against our own experience? There is therefore no reason why janglers should deride the unskilfulness of Moses in making the moon the second luminary; for he does not call us up into heaven, he only proposes things which lie open before our eyes. Let the astronomers possess their more exalted knowledge; but, in the meantime, they who perceive by the moon the splendour of the night, are convicted by its use of perverse ingratitude unless they acknowledge the beneficence of God. ¹⁶⁵

Calvin made a somewhat different use of the principle of accommodation in explaining Isaiah 19:5-6: "And the waters shall fail from the sea, and the river shall be wasted and dried up. . . . and the brooks of defence shall be emptied and dried up. . . ." The explanation which upholds the inerrancy of the Bible is found in Calvin's commentary on Isaiah 19:6.

Now, it is certain that the Nile was not laid dry, and yet the Prophet did not foretell what was not accomplished. We must therefore call to remembrance what we have already said, that on account of our stupidity those calamities are represented to us in a lively manner, which places them as it were before our eyes; for we need to have a representation made to us which is fitted to impress our minds, and to arouse us to consider the judgments of

God, which otherwise we despise. 166

The principle of accommodation was used by Calvin in his discussion of Genesis 3:1 in order to explain why Satan was not mentioned in the Genesis account of creation.

The question, however, is not yet solved, why Moses has kept back the name of Satan. I willingly subscribe to the opinion of those who maintain that the Holy Spirit then purposely used obscure figures, because it was fitting that full and clear light should be reserved for the kingdom of Christ. In the meantime, the prophets prove that they were well acquainted with the meaning of Moses, when, in different places, they cast the blame of our ruin upon the devil. We have elsewhere said, that Moses, by a homely and uncultivated style, accommodates what he delivers to the capacity of the people; and for the best reason; for not only had he to instruct an untaught race of men, but the existing age of the Church was so puerile, that it was unable to receive any higher instruction. There is, therefore, nothing absurd in the supposition, that they, whom, for the time, we know and confess to have been but as infants, were fed with milk. Or (if another comparison be more acceptable) Moses is by no means to be blamed, if he, considering the office of schoolmaster as imposed upon him, insists on the rudiments suitable to children. They who have an aversion to this simplicity must of necessity condemn the whole economy of God in governing the Church. This, however, may suffice us, that the Lord, by the secret illumination of his Spirit, supplied whatever was wanting of clearness in outward expressions; as appears plainly from the prophets, who saw Satan to be the real enemy of the human race, the contriver of all evils, furnished with every kind of fraud and villany to injure and destroy. Therefore, though the impious make a noise, there is nothing justly to offend us in this mode of speaking by which Moses describes Satan, the prince of iniquity, under the person of his servant and instrument, at the time when Christ, the Head of the

Church, and the Sun of Righteousness, had not yet openly shone forth.¹⁶⁷

Even in discussing the vision of Isaac, Calvin emphasized the principle of accommodation, as seen in his exegesis of Genesis 26:24.

Yet God did not fully manifest his glory to the holy fathers, but assumed a form by means of which they might apprehend him according to the measure of their capacities; for as the majesty of God is infinite, it cannot be comprehended by the human mind, and by its magnitude it absorbs the whole world. Besides, it follows of necessity that men, on account of their infirmity, must not only faint, but be altogether annihilated in the presence of God. Wherefore, Moses does not mean that God was seen in his true nature and greatness, but in such a manner as Isaac was able to bear the sight.¹⁶⁸

In explaining Jacob's experience at Bethel, as recorded in Genesis 35:7, Calvin gives us a further statement about accommodation.

The Papists act foolishly in affecting the praise of humility by a modesty which is most degrading. But the humility of faith is praiseworthy, seeing it does not desire to know more than God permits. And as when God descends to us, he, in a certain sense, abases himself, and stammers with us, so he allows us to stammer with him. And this is to be truly wise, when we embrace God in the manner in which he accommodates himself to our capacity. For in this way, Jacob does not keenly dispute concerning the essence of God, but renders God familiar to himself by the oracle which he has received. And because he applies his senses to the revelation, this stammering and simplicity (as I have said) is acceptable to God. Now, though at this day, the knowledge of God has shined more clearly, yet since God, in the gospel, takes upon him the character of a nursing father, let us learn to subject our

¹⁶⁷Com. Gen. 3:1.

¹⁶⁸Com. Gen. 26:24.

minds to him; only let us remember that he descends to us in order to raise us up to himself. For he does not speak to us in this earthly manner, to keep us at a distance from heaven, but rather by this vehicle, to draw us up thither. ¹⁶⁹

An emphasis on the fact that God has condescended to our sinful state is found in the comments of Calvin on John 3:12.

It is too common a fault that men desire to be taught in an ingenious and witty style. Hence, the greater part of men are so delighted with lofty and abstruse speculations. Hence, too, many hold the Gospel in less estimation, because they do not find in it high-sounding words to fill their ears, and on this account do not deign to bestow their attention on a doctrine so low and mean. But it shows an extraordinary degree of wickedness, that we yield less reverence to God speaking to us, because he condescends to our ignorance; and, therefore, when God prattles to us in Scripture in a rough and popular style, let us know that this is done on account of the love which he bears to us. ¹⁷⁰

In addition to the numerous examples in the Commentaries, there are many statements in the Institutes which emphasize how important the principle of accommodation was in the thinking of Calvin. One example of such an emphasis is found in his discussion of the unity of the divine essence.

The Anthropomorphites also, who dreamed of a corporeal God, because mouth, ears, eyes, hands, and feet are often ascribed to him in Scripture, are easily refuted. For who is so devoid of intellect as not to understand that God, in so speaking, lisps with us as nurses are wont to do with little children? Such

¹⁶⁹Com. Gen. 35:7.

¹⁷⁰Com. Jn. 3:12.

modes of expression, therefore, do not so much express what kind of a being God is, as accommodate the knowledge of him to our feebleness. In doing so, he must of course stoop far below his proper height.¹⁷¹

The principle of accommodation was also used by Calvin to explain some of the biblical statements about God's emotions. An example of this is found in his discussion of Genesis 6:6.

The repentance which is here ascribed to God does not properly belong to him, but has reference to our understanding of him. For since we cannot comprehend him as he is, it is necessary that, for our sake, he should, in a certain sense, transform himself. That repentance cannot take place in God, easily appears from this single consideration, that nothing happens which is by him unexpected or unforeseen. The same reasoning, and remark, applies to what follows, that God was affected with grief. Certainly God is not sorrowful or sad; but remains for ever like himself in his celestial and happy repose; yet, because it could not otherwise be known how great is God's hatred and detestation of sin, therefore the Spirit accommodates himself to our capacity.¹⁷²

An explanation of the wrath of God is found in Calvin's comments on Romans 1:18.

The word wrath, according to the usage of Scripture, speaking after the manner of men, means the vengeance of God; for God, in punishing, has, according to our notion, the appearance of one in wrath. It imports, therefore, no such emotion in God, but only has a reference to the perception and feeling of the sinner who is punished.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹I, xiii, 1.

¹⁷²Com. Gen. 6:6.

¹⁷³Com. Rom. 1:18.

There are undoubtedly other reasons which were partially responsible for Calvin's emphasis on the historical inerrancy, infallibility, and finality of the contents of the Bible and his resultant emphasis on the mistakes of copyists and the principle of accommodation. However, as has been shown, there is evidence that these emphases were partially caused, or at least heightened, by the conflicts with the Roman Catholics, radical sects, and heretics. In this way influences were brought to bear upon the historical principle of biblical exegesis, especially upon those aspects of this principle which are concerned with the relationship between the two testaments and the historicity of the Bible.

7. Increased emphasis on the legalistic approach and the proof-text method in biblical exegesis caused by disputes with the Roman Catholics, radical sects, and heretics.

There is evidence that Calvin, because of his many and intense controversies, departed, from time to time, from some of the essential aspects of the historical principle of biblical exegesis. This departure oftentimes took the form of an emphasis on the legalistic approach and the proof-text method in exegesis.

Much has been written about Calvin's legalistic approach and his proof-text method. Two opposing viewpoints as to the extent of his

legalism will be considered,

Some have insisted that Calvin was preeminently a legalist. In The Nature and Destiny of Man Reinhold Niebuhr makes several statements which appear to support this view of Calvin. In one place Niebuhr states that

. . . while the Lutheran side of the Reformation always walks on the edge of the precipice of supramoralism, not to say antinomianism, the Calvinistic Reformation is imperiled by the opposite danger of a new moralism and legalism.¹⁷⁴

In the same work Niebuhr has an even stronger statement about Calvin's legalism.

Calvin inclines toward legalism rather than supra-moralism. He does not, as Luther, believe that grace abrogates the law, for he does not think of sanctification as an ecstatic experience of love which transcends all law. He thinks of it rather as a rigorous obedience to law. But since it is impossible for the soul in its sinful state to know the perfect law, it is necessary for it to be guided by the "divine law" particularly as it is revealed in the Bible. (cf. Institutes III, vi. 1) Calvin's "divine law," in which he finds an answer to every moral and social problem, is nicely defined here. For it is a compendium collected from "various places in Scripture," without reference to the historical relativities which are enshrined in a sacred canon. This is the ethical corollary in Calvin's system of his general Biblicism, not to say Bibliotary.¹⁷⁵

Another statement by Niebuhr furnishes even stronger evidence that

¹⁷⁴ Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man (London: Nisbet and Co. Ltd., 1943), II, 198.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 202.

he believes that Calvin utilized a legalistic and proof-text approach.

Calvin's conception of "divine law" has the advantage of consistency over Luther's sketchy directives in the field of social and political life. But it nevertheless combines the errors of both obscurantism and pretension. It is obscurantist in that it does not sufficiently engage man's rational capacities in determining what is just and unjust in his relation to his fellows. It appeals prematurely to Biblical authority for answers to every conceivable moral and social problem. Catholic social ethics, though informed by an unjustified confidence in the ability of a universal reason to define the norms of justice, are sometimes more discriminating than the Calvinistic appeal to "divine law." Calvin's ethical system is pretentious as well as obscurantist; for it gives the Christian an unjustified confidence in the transcendent perfection of the moral standards which he has derived from Scripture and obscures not only the endless relativities of judgment, involved in applying a Scriptural standard to a particular situation, but also the historical relativities which are imbedded in these Scriptural standards themselves.¹⁷⁶

In one of his earliest books, Does Civilization Need Religion?, Reinhold Niebuhr makes an even more definite affirmation about the legalism of Calvin. In this statement Niebuhr does not appear to distinguish between the teachings of Calvin and the teachings of "Calvinism."

Its (Calvinism's) moral theories were in fact derived from the Old rather than the New Testament; and there is hardly a scintilla of evidence in Calvinistic thought that the Sermon on the Mount is recorded in the scripture which it accepted as revealed finality. Its very bibliolatry was partly responsible for its non-Christian type of ethics, for through it the casual moral theories of the early Hebrews achieved the dignity of absolute truth. Lack of historical perspective in the use of the Old Testament further aggravated this error, for the real worth of the prophets was nev-

¹⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 202-03.

er appreciated and their high type of moral idealism could not serve to qualify the less heroic morality of the law and the superficial moralizing of the Wisdom literature. Incidentally it may be observed that bibliolatry is one of the handicaps to moral progress in almost all religions. Through it primitive cultures and moral customs which happen to be enshrined in the canon become absolutely authoritative, and the weight of their influence is set against new ventures in moral life.¹⁷⁷

In his well-known work The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches Ernst Troeltsch also appears to hold the view that Calvin was to a considerable extent a legalist.

. . . not only did Calvinism not shrink from taking part in the institutions of relative Natural Law belonging to fallen human nature, but it felt no need at all to adjust its ethical ideal to the law of Christ in the New Testament or the Sermon on the Mount. . . Without hesitation he regards everything as commanded and permitted which can serve the glory of God.¹⁷⁸

Another statement by Troeltsch insists that:

. . . above all he (Calvin) bases his argument repeatedly upon the Old Testament (which cannot fail to harmonize with the Sermon on the Mount, since the Bible is a unity), upon the reforms and the policy of the kings who "feared the Lord," on the Decalogue, on the later ethic of Judaism, on David and the Psalms.¹⁷⁹

P. Smith in The Age of the Reformation states that ". . .

¹⁷⁷Niebuhr, Does Civilization Need Religion? (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1928), pp. 100-101.

¹⁷⁸Ernst Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, trans. by Olive Wyon (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1949), II, 599.

¹⁷⁹Ibid., p. 600.

Calvin sought to use the Bible as a rigid moral law to be fulfilled to the letter. . . . He preached a new legalism."¹⁸⁰

In his book The Problem of Authority in the Continental Reformers Rupert E. Davies tends to minimize any emphasis on the differences between the two testaments which was made by Calvin.

We have here material quite adequate for the elucidation of Calvin's view on the question whether the Old Testament or any parts of it are inferior in authority to the New Testament. Calvin states and stands by the definite view that the truth revealed in both Testaments is precisely the same; it follows that both Testaments, in his view, have precisely the same authority.¹⁸¹

On the other hand, some writers defend Calvin and point out that those who say that he used the legalistic approach and the proof-text method in exegesis forget some important aspects of his teaching. Men such as Fuhrmann contend that one must not forget Calvin's repeated affirmations of a progressive revelation in the Bible. Fuhrmann makes a statement which is rather representative of the position which minimizes Calvin's legalism. "Contrary to common prejudices against him, Calvin teaches that this Revelation of God has been progressive."¹⁸² According to Fuhrmann and others, Calvin affirmed

¹⁸⁰H. Preserved Smith, The Age of the Reformation (New York: H. Holt, 1920), p. 166.

¹⁸¹Rupert E. Davies, The Problem of Authority in the Continental Reformers (London: Epworth Press, 1946), p. 113.

¹⁸²Paul T. Fuhrmann, God-centered Religion (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1942), p. 84.

that God has employed an order and economy in dispensing his covenant of mercy, making additional revelations from day to day. The promise to Adam was as a feeble spark; the light was enlarged in the coming of Christ, the Sun of righteousness, who illumined the whole world.¹⁸³ Attention also is called to Calvin's presentation of the evidence of the "superior excellence of the New Testament over the Old Testament."¹⁸⁴

Dowey,¹⁸⁵ in his provocative book The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology, contends that Calvin's alleged legalism is considerably softened if the distinction between his two conceptions of law is maintained. One of Calvin's conceptions of law refers to created perfection; the other to the situation caused by the Fall. The first conception of law is not "legal" in a bad sense; that is, it has nothing to do with the conviction or restraint of sinfulness, but means simply the orderly, harmonious Creator-creature relationship.¹⁸⁶ Dowey refers to Lobstein who also holds this softened view of Calvin's legalism. Lobstein maintains that for Luther the law is primarily related

¹⁸³II, x, 20; xi, 2-5.

¹⁸⁴II, xi, 12.

¹⁸⁵Dowey, op. cit., p. 223.

¹⁸⁶Loc. cit.

to the sinner, while for Calvin the law is related chiefly to the believer for whom the maledictio is removed.¹⁸⁷ Dowey¹⁸⁸ cites Calvin's commentaries to make clear the fact that for Calvin the law for the believer is not something that comes in between God and man, but is rather the mode of the personal relation between God and man. In fact, God's orderly will for his creatures is revealed in creation, in the moral law given to Moses, and in the teachings of Jesus. These three are equated.¹⁸⁹ Dowey¹⁹⁰ quotes Jacobs as saying that, for Calvin, the life of a Christian man is an extension of the Decalogue commentary. This is in keeping with the statement of Calvin in the Institutes.

We have said that the object of regeneration is to bring the life of believers into concord and harmony with the righteousness of God, and so confirm the adoption by which they have been received as sons. But although the law comprehends within it that new life by which the image of God is restored in us, yet, as our sluggishness stands greatly in need both of helps and incentives, it will be useful to collect out of Scripture a true account of this reformation, lest any who have a heartfelt desire of repentance should in their zeal go astray.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷P. Lobstein, Die Ethik Calvins (Strasbourg: Schmidt, 1877), p. 55 f.

¹⁸⁸Dowey, op. cit., p. 225.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., p. 230.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., p. 235.

¹⁹¹III, vi, 1.

Another similar statement in the Institutes reveals Calvin's conviction that the law was the basis of the Christian life.

Although the Law of God contains a perfect rule of conduct admirably arranged, it has seemed proper to our divine Master to train his people by a more accurate method, to the rule which is enjoined in the Law. . . .¹⁹²

It is Dowey's conviction that Calvin is not as much of a legalist as is usually believed. Instead, Calvin is one who taught that the law is not a restraint of the freedom and spontaneity of love, but is rather a mode of its expression. In the Lutheran teaching, love and law were in competition. For Calvin, love and law were by definition the same thing in essence.¹⁹³

Fuhrmann and Dowey have made a good case for their contention that the emphasis on Calvin's legalistic approach and proof-text method in biblical exegesis has undoubtedly been exaggerated by many writers. There is evidence, however, that Calvin's controversies with the Roman Catholics, radical sects, and heretics influenced his use of the historical principle of biblical exegesis and caused him to be more legalistic than normally would have been the case. This influence can be seen in his conflicts with the heretics. In the heat of

¹⁹²III, vii, 1.

¹⁹³Dowey, op. cit., pp. 230-31.

these controversies Calvin was inclined to appeal to both the Old Testament and the New Testament in a rather indiscriminate manner for proof-texts. Controversies with the Roman Catholics also tempted him to use the proof-text method. For the purposes of this study, however, it will be sufficient to examine the influence of his controversies with the radical sects on his exegesis of some texts dealing with one representative area--the power of civil rulers.

The extreme views of some of the radical sects apparently caused Calvin to emphasize the texts which established the powers of the civil rulers and the magistrates. Furthermore, there is evidence that Calvin had a tendency to qualify or soften the emphasis of the texts which would lessen the rights of civil rulers and magistrates.

It is beyond the scope of this study to enter into the semi-theological field of Calvin's theory of the state and his theory of law.

Many have written about these areas. Such men as Bohatec,¹⁹⁴ Beyerhaus,¹⁹⁵ Doumergue,¹⁹⁶ Peter Barth,¹⁹⁷ and Chenevière,¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴Josef Bohatec, Calvin und das Recht (Feudigen in Westphalen, 1934).

¹⁹⁵Gisbert Beyerhaus, Studies zur Staatsanschauung Calvins (Berlin: 1910).

¹⁹⁶Doumergue, Jean Calvin, les hommes et les choses de son temps, op. cit. (1917), V, 454-75.

¹⁹⁷Peter Barth, Das Problem der natürlichen Theologie bei Calvin (Munich: 1935).

¹⁹⁸M. E. Chenevière, La Pensée Politique de Calvin (Paris: 1937).

have concerned themselves with the details of these problems.

In this section of this study it will suffice to show, by means of some representative examples, the way in which Calvin's controversies with the radical sects over the rights of civil rulers had a tendency to influence his use of the historical principle of exegesis.

That Calvin was greatly interested in defending civil government and in refuting the teachings of the radical sects on the question of civil government is seen by the fact that chapter 20 of the fourth book of the Institutes is largely devoted to this problem. There are also many other statements in the Institutes about this question. Portions of Calvin's correspondence, such as his letter to the Paris Protestants on September 16, 1557, also reveal this concern.¹⁹⁹ His sermons, likewise, display Calvin's desire to magnify the rights of rulers.²⁰⁰ However, in keeping with the emphasis of this study, the influence of Calvin's controversies with the radical sects on his exegesis will be the chief point of interest. To achieve this purpose, some representative examples from his exegetical works will be examined.

¹⁹⁹CO, XVI, 330.

²⁰⁰Cf. Sermons on Deuteronomy, CO, XXVII, 409-10, and Sermons on First Timothy, CO, LIII, 131.

Calvin's conviction that obeying civil laws was not contrary to faithfulness to God, is seen in his comments on Matthew 22:21.

For Christ intended to refute the error of those who did not think that they would be the people of God, unless they were free from every yoke of human authority. In like manner, Paul earnestly insists on this point, that they ought not the less to look upon themselves as serving God alone, if they obey human laws, if they pay tribute, and bend the neck to bear other burdens, (Rom. xiii. 7.) In short, Christ declares that it is no violation of the authority of God, or any injury done to his service, if, in respect of outward government, the Jews obey the Romans.

. . . the power of the sword, the laws, and the decisions of tribunals, do not hinder the worship of God from remaining entire amongst us.

. . . The amount of it therefore is, that those who destroy political order are rebellious against God, and therefore, that obedience to princes and magistrates is always joined to the worship and fear of God.²⁰¹

In his exegetical writings Calvin made much of the fact that the office of the magistrate or ruler was ordained by the plan and in the wisdom of God. In commenting on Romans 13:1, Calvin gave attention to the fact that the apostle urged obedience to a power that persecuted religion. Calvin used this occasion to give a strong endorsement to the state. He was apparently replying to the teachings of the Anabaptists, as can be seen from the following statement:

There are, indeed always some tumultuous spirits who believe

²⁰¹Com. Matt. 22:21.

that the kingdom of Christ cannot be sufficiently elevated, unless all earthly powers be abolished, and that they cannot enjoy the liberty given by him, except they shake off every yoke of human subjection.²⁰²

Another statement in his exegesis of the same verse points out that the ruler has been given his place by the Lord.

And it seems indeed to me, that the Apostle intended by this word to take away the frivolous curiosity of men, who are wont often to inquire by what right they who rule have obtained their authority; but it ought to be enough for us, that they do rule; for they have not ascended by their own power into this high station, but have been placed there by the Lord's hand. And by mentioning every soul, he removes every exception, lest any one should claim an immunity from the common duty of obedience.

. . . The reason why we ought to be subject to magistrates is, because they are constituted by God's ordination.²⁰³

In fact, Calvin maintained that to despise the rulers is to resist God.

For since it pleases God thus to govern the world, he who attempts to invert the order of God, and thus to resist God himself, despises his power; since to despise the providence of him who is the founder of civil power, is to carry on war with him.²⁰⁴

Luther appeared to be too deeply imbued with the Sermon on the Mount to feel altogether happy over a coercive society. It appears that for

²⁰²Com. Rom. 13:1.

²⁰³Loc. cit.

²⁰⁴Loc. cit.

Luther the state was the result of man's sinful condition.²⁰⁵ For

Calvin the state was a divine institution. Without discriminating be-

tween a Christian and a non-Christian government, Calvin affirmed

that the right of government is ordained by God for the well-being of

mankind.²⁰⁶ In his commentary on Romans 13:3, Calvin's insistence

on civil order appeared to be directed toward the radical sects.

Since then this is the only remedy by which mankind can be preserved from destruction, it ought to be carefully observed by us, unless we wish to avow ourselves as the public enemies of the human race. . . . At the same time, princes do never so far abuse their power, by harassing the good and innocent that they do not retain in their tyranny some kind of just government: there can then be no tyranny which does not in some respects assist in consolidating the society of men.²⁰⁷

The same emphasis is found in Calvin's exegesis of I Peter 2:14.

He designates every kind of magistrate, as though he had said, that there is no kind of government to which we ought not to submit. He confirms this by saying that they are God's ministers; for they who apply him to the king, are greatly mistaken. There is then a common reason, which extols the authority of all magistrates, that they rule by the command of God, and are sent by him. It hence follows (as Paul also teaches us) that they resist God, who do not obediently submit to a power ordained by him.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵M. Luther, Werke (Weimar edition; Böhlav, 1883---), XXVIII, 699.

²⁰⁶Com. Rom. 13:1.

²⁰⁷Com. Rom. 13:3.

²⁰⁸Com. I Pet. 2:14.

That Calvin believed that civil power was ordained of God is confirmed by his comments on Romans 13:5.

What he had at first commanded as to the rendering of obedience to magistrates, he now briefly repeats, but with some addition, and that is, --that we ought to obey them, not only on the ground of necessity arising from man, but that we thereby obey God; for by wrath he means the punishment which the magistrates inflict for the contempt of their dignity; as though he had said, "We must not only obey, because we cannot with impunity resist the powerful and those armed with authority; . . . but we ought to obey willingly, as conscience through God's word thus binds us." Though then the magistrate were disarmed, so that we could with impunity provide and despise him, yet such a thing ought to be no more attempted than if we were to see punishment suspended over us; for it belongs not to a private individual to take away authority from him whom the Lord has in power set over us . . . 209

A statement about the rights of civil rulers similar to the one found in Romans 13:1-5 is found in Calvin's discussion of I Peter 2:13.

He (Caesar) held, indeed, the supreme power; but that eminence which Peter extols, is common to all who exercise public authority. And so Paul, in Rom. xiii. 1, extends it to all magistrates. Now the meaning is, that obedience is due to all who rule, because they have been raised to that honour not by chance, but by God's providence. For many are wont to inquire too scrupulously by what right power has been attained; but we ought to be satisfied with this alone, that power is possessed and exercised. And so Paul cuts off the handle of useless objections when he declares that there is no power but from God. And for this reason it is that Scripture so often says, that it is God who girds kings with a sword, who raises them on high, who transfers kingdoms as he pleases. 210

209 Com. Rom. 13:5.

210 Com. I Pet. 2:13.

Throughout his exegetical writings, one notices Calvin's tendency to glorify the place of the civil ruler. Another excellent example of this emphasis is seen in his exegesis of Isaiah 49:23.

Hence it ought to be observed that something remarkable is here demanded from princes, besides an ordinary profession of faith; for the Lord has bestowed on them authority and power to defend the Church and to promote the glory of God. This is indeed the duty of all; but kings, in proportion as their power is greater, ought to devote themselves to it more earnestly, and to labour in it more diligently. And this is the reason why David expressly addresses and exhorts them to "be wise, and serve the Lord, and kiss his Son" (Ps. ii. 10-12.)

This shows how mad are the dreams of those who assert that kings cannot be Christians without laying aside that office; for those things were accomplished under Christ, when kings, who had been converted to God by the preaching of the Gospel, obtained this highest pinnacle of rank, which surpasses dominion and principality of every sort, to be "nursing-fathers" and guardians of the Church. The Papists have no other idea of kings being "nursing-fathers" of the Church than that they have left to their priests and monks very large revenues, rich possessions and prebends, on which they might fatten, like hogs in a sty. But that "nursing" aims at an object quite different from filling up those insatiable gulle. Nothing is said here about enriching the houses of those who, under false pretences, hold themselves to be ministers of the Church, (which was nothing else than to corrupt the Church of God and to destroy it by deadly poison,) but about removing superstitions and putting an end to all wicked idolatry, about advancing the kingdom of Christ and maintaining purity of doctrine, about purging scandals and cleansing from the filth that corrupts piety and impairs the lustre of the Divine majesty. ²¹¹

It is to be noticed that Calvin even called for the kings to help support the church in his discussion of Isaiah 49:23.

²¹¹Com. Isa. 49:23.

... they at the same time supply the pastors and ministers of the Word with all that is necessary for good and maintenance, provide for the poor and guard the Church against the disgrace of pauperism; erect schools, and appoint salaries for the teachers and board for the students; build poorhouses and hospitals, and make every other arrangement that belongs to the protection and defence of the Church.²¹²

Another aspect of the teaching of Calvin on civil government was his affirmation that civil government was appointed by God for both Jews and Christians.

He expressly mentions kings and other magistrates, because, more than all others, they might be hated by Christians. All the magistrates who existed at that time were so many sworn enemies of Christ; and therefore this thought might occur to them, that they ought not to pray for those who devoted all their power and all their wealth to fight against the kingdom of Christ, the extension of which is above all things desirable. The apostle meets this difficulty, and expressly joins Christians to pray for them also. And, indeed, the depravity of men is not a reason why God's ordinance should not be loved. Accordingly, seeing that God appointed magistrates and princes for the preservation of mankind, however much they fall short of the divine appointment, still we must not on that account cease to love what belongs to God, and to desire that it may remain in force. That is the reason why believers, in whatever country they live, must not only obey the laws and the government of magistrates, but likewise in their prayers supplicate God for their salvation...²¹³

That this strong emphasis on civil order was partially caused by the extremism of the radical sects is seen when consideration is given to this additional portion of Calvin's exegesis of I Timothy 2:2.

²¹²Loc. cit.

²¹³Com. I Tim. 2:2.

Hence we conclude, that fanatics, who wish to have magistrates taken away, are destitute of all humanity, and breathe nothing but cruel barbarism. How different it is to say, that we ought to pray for kings, in order that justice and decency may prevail, and to say, that not only the name of kingly power, but all government, is opposed to religion! We have the Spirit of God for the Author of the former sentiment, and therefore the latter must be from the Devil.²¹⁴

Still another example of Calvin's emphasis on the fact that civil government is ordained of God for all men is found in the comment on I Peter 2:13.

Some render the words, "to every creature," and from a rendering so obscure and ambiguous, much labour has been taken to elicit some meaning. But I have no doubt but that Peter meant to point out the distinct manner in which God governs mankind; for the verb $\kappa\tau\acute{\iota}\varsigma\epsilon\iota\nu$ in Greek, from which $\kappa\tau\acute{\iota}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ comes, means to form and to construct a building. Suitable, then, is the word "ordination"; by which Peter reminds us, that God the maker of the world has not left the human race in a state of confusion, that they might live after the manner of beasts, but as it were in a building regularly formed, and divided into several compartments.²¹⁵

Another strong emphasis in Calvin's writings is his insistence that there is nothing in the Scriptures to forbid Christians from becoming kings or governors. In his exegesis of the texts dealing with this question, his reaction to the teachings of the Anabaptists can be seen. Even in discussing verses such as Matthew 20:25-26, which

²¹⁴Loc. cit.

²¹⁵Com. I Pet. 2:13.

call for the great ones to be servants, Calvin took special precautions to emphasize that this saying does not apply to all the godly.

He shows that the primacy, which was the occasion of dispute among them, has no existence in his kingdom. Those persons, therefore, who extend this saying indiscriminately to all the godly are mistaken; for Christ only takes occasion from the present occurrence to show that it is absurd in the apostles to dispute about the degree of power and honour in their own rank, because the office of teaching, to which they were appointed, has no resemblances to the governments of the world. I do acknowledge that this doctrine applies both to private persons and to kings and magistrates; for no man deserves to be reckoned one of Christ's flock, unless he has made such proficiency under the teacher of humility, as to claim nothing for himself, but condescend to cultivate brotherly love. This is, no doubt, true; but the design of Christ was, as I have said, to distinguish between the spiritual government of his Church and the empires of the world, that the apostles might not look for the favours of a court; for in proportion as any of the nobles is loved by kings, he rises to wealth and distinction. But Christ appoints pastors of his Church, not to rule, but to serve.²¹⁶

The next part of the discussion of the same verses clearly reveals the influence of the extremism of the radical sects.

This refutes the error of the Anabaptists, who exclude kings and magistrates from the Church of God, because Christ declares that they are not like his disciples; though the comparison is here made not between Christians and ungodly men, but between the nature of their offices. Besides, Christ did not look so much at the persons of men as at the condition of his Church. For it was possible that one who was governor of a village or a city might, in a case of urgent necessity, discharge also the office of teaching; but Christ satisfied himself with explaining what belongs to the apostolic office, and what is at variance with it.

²¹⁶Com. Matt. 20:25-26.

... Christ distinguishes between the apostles and the rank of kings, not because kings have a right to act haughtily, but because the station of royalty is different from the apostolic office. While, therefore, both ought to be humble, it is the duty of the apostles always to consider what form of government the Lord has appointed for his Church. 217

In his exegesis of these same verses from Matthew, Calvin gave an apology for the wealth of rulers.

As to the words which Matthew employs, the princes of the Gentiles rule over them, Luke conveys the same import by saying, they are called benefactors; which means, that kings possess great wealth and abundance, in order that they may be generous and bountiful. For though kings have greater delight in their power, and a stronger desire that it should be formidable, than that it should be founded in the consent of the people, still they desire the praise of munificence. Hence, too, they take the name in the Hebrew language, נְדִיבִים, (nedibim). They are so called from bestowing gifts; for taxes and tributes are paid to them for no other purpose than to furnish the expense necessary to the magnificence of their rank. 218

It is noteworthy that Calvin gave considerable attention to those portions of Scripture which permit men to be the ministers of God in inflicting punishment. An example of this emphasis is found in his comments on Romans 13:4.

And then he says, An avenger, to execute wrath, etc. This is the same as if it had been said, that he is an executioner of God's wrath; and this he shows himself to be by having the sword, which the Lord has delivered into his hand. This is a remarkable

217 Loc. cit.

218 Loc. cit.

passage for the purpose of proving the right of the sword; for if the Lord, by arming the magistrate, has also committed to him the use of the sword, whenever he visits the guilty with death, by executing God's vengeance, he obeys his commands. Contend then do they with God who think it unlawful to shed the blood of wicked men.²¹⁹

The parable of the tares would appear to be opposed to Calvin's viewpoint on the power of magistrates to inflict punishment. His exegesis handled this problem. He was able to solve the difficulties brought up by the interpretation which the Anabaptists gave to this verse. This can be seen by a study of his exegesis of Matthew 13:39.

This passage has been most improperly abused by the Anabaptists, and by others like them, to take from the Church the power of the sword. But it is easy to refute them; for since they approve of excommunication, which cuts off, at least for a time, the bad and reprobate, why may not godly magistrates, when necessity calls for it, use the sword against wicked men? They reply that, when the punishment is not capital, there is room allowed for repentance; as if the thief on the cross (Luke xxiii. 42.) did not find the means of salvation. I shall satisfy myself with replying that Christ does not now speak of the office of pastors or of magistrates, but removes the offence which is apt to disturb weak minds, when they perceive that the Church is composed not only of the elect, but of the polluted dregs of society.²²⁰

In opposition to the teachings of many radical sects, Calvin maintained that the Scriptures allow judicial proceedings and lawsuits. In interpreting Matthew 5:34, much of his discussion is devoted to a

²¹⁹Com. Rom. 13:4.

²²⁰Com. Matt. 13:39.

refutation of the Anabaptist teaching which was opposed to oaths. Calvin defended the use of oaths in judicial proceedings.

The Anabaptists, too, have blustered a great deal, on the ground, that Christ appears to give no liberty to swear on any occasion, because he commands, Swear not at all. But we need not go beyond the immediate context to obtain the exposition: for he immediately adds, neither by heaven, nor by the earth. Who does not see that those kinds of swearing were added by way of exposition, to explain the former clause more fully by specifying a number of cases? The Jews had circuitous or indirect ways of swearing: and when they swore by heaven, or by earth, or by the altar, (Mat. xxiii. 18,) they reckoned it to be next to nothing; and, as one vice springs from another, they defended, under this pretence, any profanation of the name of God that was not openly avowed.

To meet this crime, our Lord declares that they must not swear at all, either in this or that way, either by heaven, or by the earth. Hence we conclude, that the particle, at all, relates not to the substance, but to the form, and means, "neither directly nor indirectly." It would otherwise have been superfluous to enumerate those kinds; and therefore the Anabaptists betray not only a rage for controversy, but gross ignorance, when they obstinately press upon us a single word, and pass over, with closed eyes, the whole scope of the passage. Is it objected, that Christ permits no swearing? I reply: What the expounder of the law says, must be viewed in connection with its design. His statement amounts to this, that there are other ways of "taking the name of God in vain," besides perjury; and, therefore, that we ought to refrain from allowing ourselves the liberty of unnecessary swearing; for, when there are just reasons to demand it, the law not only permits, but expressly commands us to swear. Christ, therefore, meant nothing more than this, that all oaths are unlawful, which in any way abuse and profane the sacred name of God, for which they ought to have had the effect of producing a deeper reverence.²²¹

In attempting to maintain the right of Christians to engage in lawsuits,

²²¹ Com. Matt. 5:34.

Calvin proposed a rather unusual interpretation of Matthew 5:40.

Christ now glances at another kind of annoyance, and that is, when wicked men torment us with law-suits. He commands us, even on such an occasion, to be so patient and submissive that, when our coat has been taken away, we shall be prepared to give up our cloak also. None but a fool will stand upon the words, so as to maintain, that we must yield to our opponents what they demand, before coming into a court of law; for such compliance would more strongly inflame the minds of wicked men to robbery and extortion; and we know, that nothing was farther from the design of Christ. What then is meant by giving the cloak to him who endeavors, on the ground of a legal claim, to take away our coat? If a man, oppressed by an unjust decision, loses what is his own, and yet is prepared, when it shall be found necessary, to part with the remainder, he deserves not less to be commended for patience, than the man who allows himself to be twice robbed before coming into court. In short, when Christians meet with one who endeavors to wrench from them a part of their property, they ought to be prepared to lose the whole.

Hence we conclude, that Christians are not entirely prohibited from engaging in law-suits, provided they have a just defence to offer. Though they do not surrender their goods as a prey, yet they do not depart from this doctrine of Christ, which exhorts us to bear patiently "the spoiling of our goods," (Heb. x. 34.) It is, no doubt, rare to find a man who proceeds, with mild and proper feelings, to plead in a court; but, as it is possible for a man to defend a just cause with a view to the public advantage, we have no right to condemn the thing in itself, because it appears to be directed by improper feelings.²²²

Much additional evidence can be cited for the assertion that Calvin's exegesis was influenced by the extremism of some of the radical sects. In his exegesis of passage after passage he referred to the sects and sought to refute their views and vindicate orderly government and ju-

²²²Com. Matt. 5:40.

dicial proceedings. Another example of this emphasis is found in his comments on James 5:12.

The Anabaptists, building on this passage, condemn all oaths, but they only show their ignorance. For James does not speak of oaths in general, nor does Christ in the passage to which I have referred; but both condemn that evasion which had been devised, when men took the liberty to swear without expressing the name of God, which was a liberty repugnant to the prohibition of the law.

And this is what the words clearly mean, Neither by heaven, neither by the earth. For, if the question had been as to oaths in themselves, to what purpose were these forms mentioned? ²²³

A further apologetic for civil government, laws, magistrates, and edicts is found in Calvin's discussion of Titus 3:1.

Thus, after having spoken of particular duties, Paul now wishes to give a general admonition to all, to observe peaceably the order of civil government, to submit to the laws, to obey magistrates. That subjection to princes, and that obedience to magistrates, which he demands, is extended to edicts, and laws, and other parts of civil government. ²²⁴

That this strong apologetic was called for by the teachings of the radical sects can be seen by noting Calvin's additional comment on Titus 3:1.

For, since they have been appointed for the preservation of mankind, he who desires to have them removed, or shakes off their yoke, is an enemy of equity and justice, and is therefore devoid of all humanity. ²²⁵

²²³Com. James 5:12.

²²⁴Com. Titus 3:1.

²²⁵Loc. cit.

In interpreting I Corinthians 6:1-8, a passage which deals with Christians taking lawsuits before heathen judges, Calvin revealed in a striking way his interest in maintaining the dignity, status, and power of the civil rulers and civil courts. On seven occasions, in his exegesis of this one passage, he makes certain that the reader realized that Paul is not condemning law-courts and magistrates. Some of these occasions will be listed.

Paul does not here condemn those who from necessity have a cause before unbelieving judges, as when a person is summoned to a court; but those who, of their own accord, bring their brethren into this situation, and harass them, as it were, through means of unbelievers, while it is in their power to employ another remedy. It is wrong, therefore, to institute of one's own accord a law-suit against brethren before unbelieving judges. If, on the other hand, you are summoned to a court, there is no harm in appearing there and maintaining your cause. 226

Another opportunity for Calvin to emphasize that Paul did not deplore law courts was found in his exegesis of I Corinthians 6:4.

We must always keep in view what causes he is treating of; for public trials are beyond our province, and ought not to be transferred to our disposal; but as to private matters it is allowable to determine without the cognizance of the magistrate. As, then, we do not detract in any degree from the authority of the magistrate by having recourse to arbitration . . . 227

Still another opportunity came in his discussion of the same verse.

226 Com. I Cor. 6:1.

227 Com. I Cor. 6:4.

Calvin affirmed that "there is, therefore, no detracting here from the dignity of the office of magistrates . . . 228 As if he had not emphasized his point strongly enough, Calvin continued to point out that this passage does not condemn law-courts or magistrates.

For my own part, my answer is simply this--having a little before given permission to have recourse to arbiters, he has in this shown, with sufficient clearness, that Christians are not prohibited from prosecuting their rights moderately, and without any breach of love. 229

There is still another example of Calvin's emphasis in this same passage.

Let us therefore bear in mind, that Paul does not condemn law-suits on the ground of its being a wrong thing in itself to maintain a good cause by having recourse to a magistrate, but because it is almost invariably accompanied with corrupt dispositions . . . 230

Two paragraphs later Calvin again returned to the same emphasis.

If, therefore, a Christian man wishes to prosecute his rights at law, so as not to offend God, he must, above all things, take heed that he does not bring into court any desire of revenge, any corrupt affection of the mind, or anger, or, in fine, any other poison. 231

At the close of his exegesis of I Corinthians 6:7, Calvin summarized

228 Loc. cit.

229 Com. I Cor. 6:7.

230 Loc. cit.

231 Loc. cit.

by saying that "it was useful for many reasons to show that the thing (use of courts of law) is not evil in itself, but is rendered corrupt by abuse."²³²

Still another aspect of the question of the rights of the civil rulers is emphasized by Calvin when he gave considerable attention to the Scriptures which supposedly teach that God uses tyrants and sometimes even requires submission to tyrants. Even tyranny is better than anarchy, affirmed Calvin. It appears that such strong emphases were partially caused by the extremism of the radical sects. A representative example of Calvin's emphasis is found in his elaboration of the meaning of I Peter 2:14.

Were any one again to object and say that we ought not to obey princes who, as far as they can, pervert the holy ordinance of God, and thus become savage wild beasts, . . . my reply is this, that government established by God ought to be so highly valued by us, as to honour even tyrants when in power. There is yet another reply still more evident--that there has never been a tyranny, (nor can one be imagined,) however cruel and unbridled, in which some portion of equity has not appeared; and further, some kind of government, however deformed and corrupt it may be, is still better and more beneficial than anarchy.²³³

The tendency of Calvin to magnify the necessity of civil order, even if it involved submission to a tyrant, is further demonstrated by the fact

²³²Loc. cit.

²³³Com. I Pet. 2:14.

that Calvin was careful to point out that even a pagan ruler like Nebuchadnezzar was raised up by God for his purposes.

But Daniel shows that he did not flatter the king, since he assigns this reason for Nebuchadnezzar being the golden head--God had set him up above all the earth. But this seems to be common to all kings, since none of them reign without God's permission--a sentiment which is partially true, but the Prophet implies that Nebuchadnezzar was raised up in especial manner, because he excelled all other sovereigns.²³⁴

Another statement which is representative of the emphasis of Calvin on the place of tyrants is found in his discussion of Daniel 5:18-20.

We have stated elsewhere, and Daniel repeats it often, that empires are bestowed on men by divine power and not by chance, as Paul announces, There is no power but of God. (Rom. xiii. 1.) God wishes his power to be specially visible in kingdoms. Although, therefore, he takes care of the whole world, and, in the government of the human family even the most miserable things are regulated by his hand, yet his singular providence shines forth in the empire of the world. But since we have often discussed this point at length, and shall have many opportunities of recurring to it, it is now sufficient just briefly to notice the principle of the exaltation of earthly kings by the hand of God, and not by the chances of fortune.

.... Whence happens it, since ambition is natural to all men, that many thousands are subject to one, and suffer themselves to be ruled over and endure many oppressions? How could this be, unless God entrusted the sword of power to those whom he wishes to excel? This reason, then, must be diligently noticed, when the Prophet says, All men tremble at the sight of King Nebuchadnezzar, because God conferred upon him that majesty, and wished him to excel all the monarchs of the world. God has many reasons, and often hidden ones, why he raises one man and humbles another; yet this point ought to be uncontroverted by us. No

kings can possess any authority unless God extends his hand to them and props them up. When he wishes to remove them from power, they fall of their own accord; not because there is any chance in the changes of the world, but because God, as it is said in the Book of Job, (xii. 18,) deprives those of the sword whom he had formerly entrusted with it.

. . . Daniel here shows how King Nebuchadnezzar was not carried away by his own plans, or purposes, or good fortune, but was entrusted with supreme power and rendered formidable to all men, because God had designed him for his own glory.²³⁵

One of the strongest statements that Calvin made in regard to the fact that rulers can be tyrants and still God's servants to be obeyed, is found in his exegesis of Jeremiah 27:6-7.

Nebuchadnezzar is afterwards called the servant of God, not that he was worthy of such an honour, as it had never been his purpose to labour for God; but he was called a servant, because God designed to employ him in his service, as those are called in the Psalms the sons of God, to whom the word of God was addressed, that is, to whom he gave authority to rule. (Psalm lxxxii. 6; John x. 35.) So also Nebuchadnezzar was God's servant, because he was divinely endued with sovereign power. This he did not know, nor was this said for his sake, nor was he honoured with such a name, as though God regarded him as one of his own people; but this had a reference to the Jews and to all the other nations, in order that they might be fully persuaded that they were obeying God in humbling themselves and in undertaking the yoke of the king of Babylon, for this pleased God. There is no power, says Paul, but from God, (Rom. xiii. 1,) and that sentence is derived from this principle, that all power is from God; for he gives the power to rule and to govern to whom he pleases. Whosoever, then, are endued with the power of the sword and public authority, are God's servants, though they exercise tyranny and be robbers. They are servants, not with respect to them-

²³⁵Com. Dan. 5:18-20.

selves, but because God would have them to be acknowledged as his ministers until their time shall come, according to what follows . . . 236

Calvin's exegesis of Romans 13:3 was an occasion for him to point out that

. . . princes do never so far abuse their power, by harassing the good and innocent, that they do not retain in their tyranny some kind of just government; there can then be no tyranny which does not in some respects assist in consolidating the society of men. 237

One more illustration of Calvin's strong emphasis on the necessity of order will be given. In exegeting Genesis 14:1-9, Calvin pointed out that Chedorlaomer had the right to punish his subjects because of their rebellion. Calvin's further comment reflected his emphasis on order as opposed to anarchy.

For although liberty is by no means to be despised, yet the subjection which is once imposed upon us cannot, without implied rebellion against God, be shaken off; because "every power is ordained by God," notwithstanding, in its commencement, it may have flowed from the lust of dominion, (Rom. xiii. 1.) Therefore some of the rebels are slaughtered like cattle; and others, though they have clothed themselves in armour, and are prepared to resist, are yet driven to flight; thus, unhappily to all concerned, terminates the contumacious refusal to pay tribute. And such narratives are to be noticed, that we may learn from them, that all who strive to produce anarchy, fight against God. 238

236 Com. Jer. 27:6-7.

237 Com. Rom. 13:3.

238 Com. Gen. 14:1-9.

In all fairness, however, it must be pointed out that Calvin did make exceptions to his demand that all men give heed to civil rulers. One of these exceptions is given in his comments on Acts 5:29,

God doth set men over us in such sort with power, that he keepeth still his own authority safe and sound. Therefore, we must obey rulers so far, that the commandment of God be not broken. . . . Yes, man is nothing else but an instrument of God. If a magistrate do his duty as he ought, a man shall in vain say that he is contrary to God, seeing that he dissenteth in nothing; yea, rather the contrary rule is then in force. We must obey God's ministers and officers if we will obey him. But so soon as rulers do lead us away from the obedience of God, because they strive against God with sacrilegious boldness, their pride must be abated, that God may be above all in authority. Then all smokes of honour vanish away. For God doth not vouchsafe to bestow honourable titles upon men, to the end they may darken his glory. Therefore, if a father being not content with his own estate, do essay to take from God the chief honour of a father, he is nothing else but a man. If a king, or ruler, or magistrate, do become so lofty that he diminisheth the honour and authority of God, he is but a man.²³⁹

In his exegesis of Psalm 82:1-6, Calvin asserted that although the rulers have been elevated to a high office, this elevation should not be an occasion for them to turn to wickedness, but rather it should be an occasion for fear and trembling and obedience to God.²⁴⁰ Even though Calvin devoted a considerable amount of space in his commentary on Daniel to the establishment of the fact that rulers are ordained of God,

²³⁹Com. Acts 5:29.

²⁴⁰Com. Ps. 82:1-6.

he did make some qualifying statements in this commentary. One of these is found in his exegesis of Daniel 6:22.

Since, therefore, Daniel could not obey the king's edict without denying God, as we have previously seen, he did not transgress against the king by constantly persevering in that exercise of piety to which he had been accustomed, and by calling on his God three times a-day. To make this the more evident, we must remember that passage of Peter, "Fear God, honour the king." (I Pet. ii. 17.) The two commandments are connected together, and cannot be separated from one another. The fear of God ought to precede, that kings may obtain their authority. For if any one begins his reverence of an earthly prince by rejecting that of God, he will act preposterously, since this is a complete perversion of the order of nature. Then let God be feared in the first place, and earthly princes will obtain their authority, if only God shines forth, as I have already said. Daniel, therefore, here defends himself with justice, since he had not committed any crime against the king; for he was compelled to obey the command of God, and he neglected what the king had ordered in opposition to it. For earthly princes lay aside all their power when they rise up against God, and are unworthy of being reckoned in the number of mankind. We ought rather utterly to defy than to obey them whenever they are so restive and wish to spoil God of his rights, and, as it were, to seize upon his throne and draw him down from heaven.²⁴¹

Another example of Calvin's qualification of his emphasis on the rights of rulers is found in his commentary on Hosea 5:12.

We now see how vain is the excuse of those who say that they ought to obey kings, and at the same time forsake the word of God: for what does the Prophet reprove here, but that the Israelites had been too submissive to their king? "But this in itself was worthy of praise." True, when the king commanded nothing contrary to God's word; but when he perverted God's worship, when he set up corrupt superstitions, then the people ought to

²⁴¹Com. Dan. 6:22.

have firmly resisted him; but as they were too pliant; nay, willingly allowed themselves to be drawn away from the true worship of God, the Prophet says here, that they had no reason to complain, that they were too sharply and too severely chastised by the Lord.²⁴²

In the Institutes Calvin further qualified the rights of civil rulers.

Among other things, he insisted that no church or state can bind the conscience,²⁴³ the magistrates of the people can oppose the ruler,²⁴⁴ and no human institutions can impose themselves between men and God.²⁴⁵

Despite the fact that Calvin left room for both the conservative and revolutionary approaches to the problem of the rights of civil rulers, there is evidence which leads to the conclusion that his exegesis was characterized by a tendency to magnify the power and place of civil rulers and magistrates. There is also evidence that this emphasis was caused to some extent by the influence of the extreme views of some of the radical sects. Furthermore, as has been shown, there is evidence that his controversies with the radical sects influenced his use of the historical principle of biblical exegesis, causing

²⁴²Com. Hosea 5:12.

²⁴³IV, x, 5.

²⁴⁴IV, xx, 32.

²⁴⁵IV, x, 8.

him to be more legalistic and arbitrary than he would have been under different circumstances.

The study undertaken in this section confirms, to some extent, at least, the statement of John Knox which is described by George Adam Smith as follows:

Knox, in his arraignment of Queen Mary, had argued on the ground that the Law of Moses was binding on Christians. . . . To statements by Calvin and others, that the Old Testament contained proofs of the lawfulness of even tyrannical governments and of the people's duty of obedience to them, Knox answered that Calvin had been arguing against the anarchical Anabaptists . . .²⁴⁶

A concluding statement which will summarize the evidence of this section of the study--the section on Calvin's legalistic approach and proof-text method--is now in order. Despite the fact that Calvin's legalistic approach and proof-text method in biblical exegesis were not as extravagant or extensive as many writers would indicate, there is some evidence that he was drawn away from his customary and oft-avowed historical principle of biblical exegesis by his controversies with the Roman Catholics, radical sects, and heretics. These controversies did have some influence on his use of the historical principle of exegesis.

²⁴⁶George Adam Smith, Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament (second edition; New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1901), pp. 260-61.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Although it is not always easy to sum up in a few brief paragraphs the results of a detailed study and analysis, such a summary is helpful. An attempt will be made in this last section of this study to present a summary and a few relevant conclusions.

Despite the fact that Calvin's position as an important exegete in the history of interpretation has been established, it is doubtful whether enough attention has been devoted to his exegetical writings. In fact, Calvin has been studied to a large extent in terms of the systematic structure of the Institutes of 1559 without corresponding attention being given to his biblical commentaries. However, the "Neo-reformation" or "Neo-orthodox" movement of the last two decades combined with a general resurgence of interest in biblical exegesis has helped to revive interest in Calvin's exegetical writings and exegetical methods.

Basic to a proper understanding of any exegete is a recognition of the fact that all exegetes are historically conditioned in their use of exegetical principles. Calvin is not an exception to this rule. Therefore, to understand properly and evaluate correctly Calvin's ex-

exegetical contribution, it is necessary to examine the factors which influenced his use of basic exegetical principles.

It is difficult for a person removed by four centuries from another to appraise adequately the factors which influenced the latter's exegetical methods. It is also true that judgments about exegetical methods are often influenced by temperamental bias and personal background as much as they are by "objective" analysis. Another consideration is the fact that abstract intellectual dissection of a man's exegetical methods does not always mean that the true significance of an exegete's work is really grasped. Sometimes a detailed analysis becomes so engrossed in the details that the broader meanings are missed. In the realm of religious writings it is especially difficult to sift out the full meaning by means of detailed, rational analysis. In conducting this investigation of the factors influencing Calvin's use of the linguistic and historical principles of biblical exegesis, these considerations have been kept in mind. An attempt has been made to understand Calvin in terms of his own time and frame of reference. The study has also sought to avoid the loss of his major emphases in the process of noting his historical limitations.

Calvin recognized, at least in a modified and limited way, basic principles of biblical exegesis which are accepted today. The

arrangement of these for the purpose of this study includes the linguistic, historical, theological, and homiletical principles.

Among other things, the theological principle includes the importance of Christian experience for the proper understanding of the Bible, the interpretation of ambiguous passages in the light of the central emphases of the Bible, and the certifying and illuminating power of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

The apparent recognition by Calvin of the fact that the Reformation movement was in dire need of efficient organization and an example of the practical application of biblical principles undoubtedly influenced his use of the homiletical or practical principle of biblical exegesis. In meeting this need, Calvin's exegesis, although not allegorical, tended to be very practical.

The two primary principles of exegesis which are basic for any exegetical work are the linguistic and the historical. These two principles probably were influenced the most by Calvin's particular historical background, training, and controversies. In this study, therefore, especial attention has been given to the factors which influenced Calvin's use of these two basic principles of biblical exegesis.

One of Calvin's most significant contributions was his strong emphasis on the linguistic principle of exegesis--a principle which, to a large extent, had been neglected. The linguistic principle in-

cludes a consideration of the text, grammar, literal meaning, and the context,

Among factors influencing Calvin's use of the linguistic principle was the development of textual criticism during the first half of the sixteenth century. Although Calvin did not accept all of the results of the textual critics, he did utilize their methods and many of their conclusions.

Another factor influencing Calvin's use of the linguistic principle was his Humanist training. This training included a thorough linguistic background. His Commentaries furnish ample evidence of his intimate knowledge of the original biblical languages and his constant utilization of this linguistic knowledge. His Humanist training also included a critical and logical emphasis. Calvin's commentary on the two books of Seneca's De Clementia reveals his extensive and thorough Humanist training. From this Humanist training he inherited a "mental set" which included a reaction against scholastic tradition, a zeal for the true text, a sophisticated and esthetic style, a concern for words and their meaning, and a logical and objective outlook. It has been shown that his Humanist and classical studies helped to make him an instrument for the restoration of the linguistic principle to its proper place in biblical hermeneutics.

Still another factor which influenced Calvin's use of the linguistic principle was the excessive use of allegory by some Patristic and medieval exegetes. Allegory was carried to such an extreme by some of these exegetes that Calvin became rather drastic in his reaction. Calvin was one of the first exegetes in many centuries to avoid allegory consistently and devote himself to the one literal meaning of the text. Many examples of Calvin's reaction have been given. In fact, some maintain that Calvin reacted so far that he tended to make biblical poetry into prose. In any case, it is evident that Calvin became more conscious of the "one-meaning" aspect of the linguistic principle as a reaction to the excessive use of allegory by some of the Patristic and medieval exegetes:

There is evidence that Calvin's use of the historical principle of biblical exegesis was also influenced by various factors. The historical principle of exegesis includes consideration of the historical setting and background of the biblical books, the chronology of the Bible, the canon, and the problem of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The three factors which influenced Calvin's use of the historical principle which have been suggested in this study have been considered under the general heading of religious authority. Calvin was

faced with the problem of dealing with the Roman Catholic emphasis on the importance of tradition and the Old Testament Apocrypha, the emphasis of the radical sects on private revelations, and the Humanism and rationalism of the heretics, Calvin apparently realized that if the Protestant Reformation were to succeed, the question of that which was to be the final authority in religion had to be faced and solved.

The Roman Catholic emphasis on tradition and the Old Testament Apocrypha, as enunciated in official statements such as those issued by the Council of Trent, greatly alarmed Calvin, as has been noted in the study of his writings. The emphasis of the radical sects on private revelations and the inner light also caused Calvin much concern, as has been pointed out. Controversies with the heretics over their humanistic and rationalistic emphases likewise aroused Calvin and brought forth many strong statements. Each of these controversies had some influence on his utilization of the historical principle of biblical exegesis. There is evidence in Calvin's exegetical writings that the necessity of combating the Roman Catholic utilization of the Old Testament Apocrypha and tradition, and the emphasis of the radical sects on private revelations increased his interest in the problem of the canon, the historical background of the Bible and the biblical books, and the chronology of the books of the Bible. Further consid-

eration revealed that Calvin was led to put an increased emphasis on the historical inerrancy, infallibility, and finality of the Bible because of his conflicts with the Roman Catholics, radical sects, and heretics. In fact, there is evidence that Calvin developed and emphasized the principle of accommodation in order to help defend the inerrancy of the Bible. In this way influences were brought to bear upon the historical principle of biblical exegesis, especially upon those aspects of this principle which are concerned with the relation of the two testaments and the historicity of the Bible.

The controversies of Calvin also resulted in a negative influence on his use of the historical principle of exegesis. This investigation has revealed that at least in part Calvin's controversies caused him to have a tendency to emphasize the legalistic approach and the proof-text method in his exegesis. Although many have overemphasized the legalism of Calvin, evidence has been given in this study to substantiate the affirmation that he was drawn away from his customary and oft-avowed historical principle of exegesis from time to time. An examination of his exegesis of some texts dealing with one representative area--the question of the power of civil rulers--revealed the influence of his controversies with the radical sects on his use of the historical principle of biblical exegesis.

Although the primary purpose of this study is fulfilled in the presentation of some of the factors which influenced Calvin's use of the linguistic and historical principles of biblical exegesis, it will not be inappropriate to suggest some significant aspects of his contribution to the field of hermeneutics which have been suggested by this study. Some of Calvin's limitations as an exegete which have been suggested by this study will also be noted.

Calvin made a significant contribution in helping to restore the linguistic principle of exegesis to its position as the basic and foundational principle of biblical exegesis. He did this by his emphasis on the importance of words and the original languages of the Bible, his consideration of the text, his rejection of allegory, and his insistence on the literal meaning of the Scriptures. This contribution is especially noteworthy when one considers the limitations of the critical apparatus and linguistic equipment of his day, and the fact that many exegetes still accepted some aspects of the allegorical method of interpretation.

Although some would disagree, on the basis of this study it can be suggested that Calvin made a definite contribution in the field of religious authority. His emphasis on the inner witness of the Holy Spirit should be mentioned, although a consideration of the implications of this idea was not within the scope of this study. In addition

to this obvious contribution, the importance of Calvin's emphasis on the historicity of the Bible should be mentioned. His views anticipated in some ways the modern emphasis on the fact that God has chosen to reveal himself in the "concrete stuff" of history and in "particular historical events." Calvin also anticipated in some ways the emphasis which is being made in some scholarly circles on the fact that Christianity is closely bound to its documents. Another significant contribution is Calvin's principle of accommodation. The problem of religious authority continues to be a basic problem and "conservatives" have found Calvin's principle of accommodation a helpful instrument in their effort to combine a high view of inspiration and intellectual respectability. By using the principle of accommodation, many irregularities can be explained which otherwise would have to be accepted as inaccuracies.

Calvin's historical conditioning can best be seen in his tendency to use the proof-text method and the legalistic approach in biblical exegesis. In addition to the fact that the proof-text method was the generally accepted method in the sixteenth century, Calvin's controversies with the Roman Catholics, radical sects, heretics, and other groups undoubtedly caused him to be more legalistic than would have been the case under different historical conditions.

If Calvin is seen in the light of his historical background, which included the unusual religious and humanistic ferment of the sixteenth century, that part of his exegesis which is historically conditioned can be recognized and minimized, and that part which is of universal and permanent value can be utilized and magnified. Despite its historical conditioning and consequent limitations, John Calvin's biblical exegesis contains much of value which should commend it to the twentieth century--or to any century.

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